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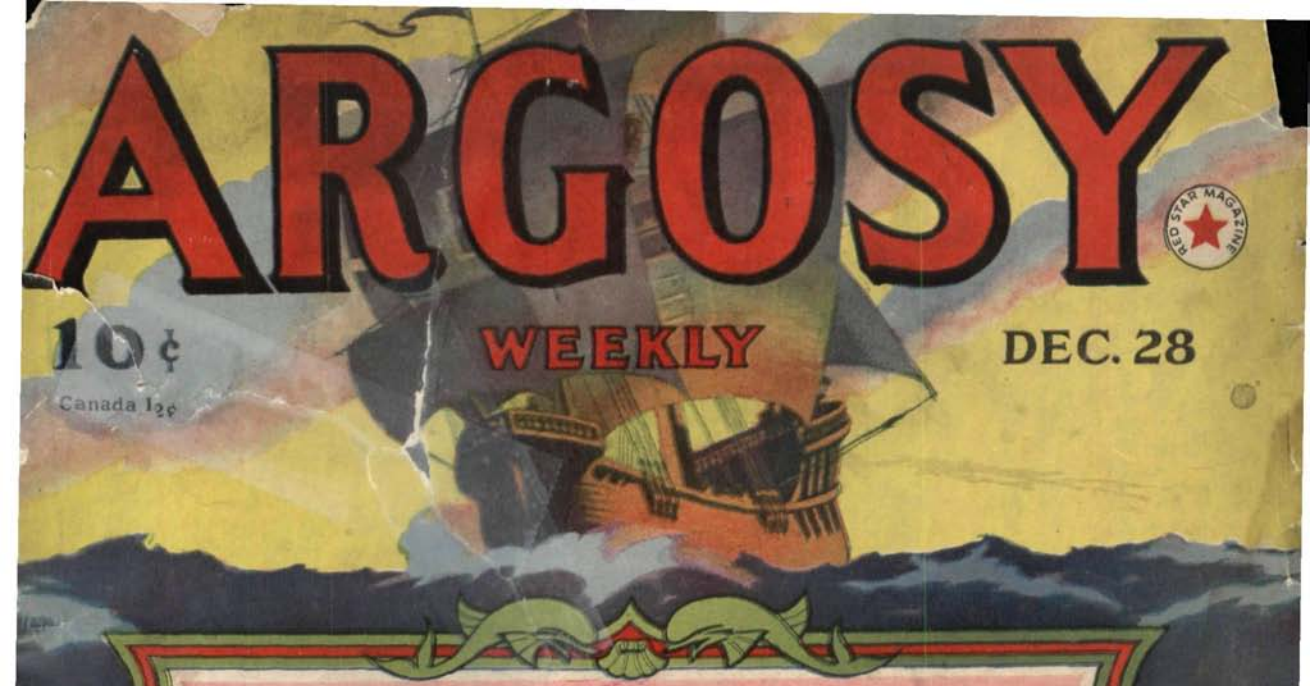

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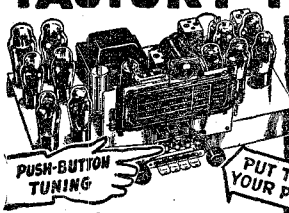

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Thunder Hoofs

By BENNETT FOSTER

Author of "Rawhide Road," "Rider of the Rifle Rock," etc.

CHAPTER I

YANK AND REB

AT NOON, well along the road to Bendicíon, the El Paso stage stopped to change horses. Since early morning Dan Shea had been riding the leather-covered seat and so now he stepped out to stretch his long legs. Fitzpatrick, the saloon keeper, also alighted from the stage, correcting the angle of his narrow-brimmed derby hat and settling his coat more truly on his shoulders.

The trip down had been a pleasant one despite the heat which comes early in the middle valley of the Rio Grande. The men had enjoyed it. Fitzpatrick, returning to Bendicíon following a buying trip to the Pueblo of Albuquerque, was a friendly, talkative man, his occupation, his iden-

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Of the Old West, where a man could carve out a world to fit his pattern. Of sheep, and the sudden hazards of a range marked out by gunfire. Of two men's feud, and its dark progress

Another cowman went down under Shea's Irish fury

tity, and his convictions an open book for all to read.

Dan Shea, more reticent, had risen a trifle to Fitzpatrick's talk, and a curious discovery brought them together. At the Vicksburg siege Dan Shea had been outside the city; Fitzpatrick within it. Old enemies, their animosity had long since died. The Lost Cause was lost.

As a loser, Fitzpatrick had the tale of many a victory to recount. As a winner, Dan Shea could afford to be generous. The bitterness of the fight was gone from between these fighting men and here in the middle of the New Mexico Territory, the war was a remote thing, as far distant as a game of chess played ten years agone.

"Yank an' Reb," Fitzpatrick said, leading the way toward the dark door of the stage station, "an' both of us Irish. It just goes to show what an Irishman will do to get into a fight. I'll buy you a drink, Shea."

"And I'll buy your dinner," Dan Shea answered. "We lay over here."

As they entered the station Fitzpatrick

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pushed back his hat. He was a lank man, hair and mustache the color of the desert, and his eyes a faded blue. Dan Shea was heavier, broader, and more youthful. Black Irish showed in hair and blue eyes.

Beside the desk that immediately confronted the door, the bar of the stage-stop stretched to the left. To the right was the dining room, the walls white-plastered, and the single long table almost filling the narrow space. The station manager was outside with the hostlers and only a native barman attended the bar, while at the table three men stopped their eating to survey the newcomers. Fitzpatrick leaned easily against the bar and spoke to the barman whom he knew. Dan Shea, pausing just inside the door, scanned the room and its occupants.

The men at the table fell to eating again and Fitzpatrick said: "Give me whisky, Carlos," and looked toward Dan, lifting his eyebrows in inquiry.

"The same," Dan agreed, and took the short two steps that brought him to Fitzpatrick's side. As the small glasses were set out and the bartender reached for the bottle on the back-bar, there came the rattle and clank, the thudding of hoofs, that announced the arrival of another stage. Again the men at the table lifted their heads to watch the door.

"The east-bound stage," Fitzpatrick commented. "Well," he turned his small glass between his fingers, "I'll give you a toast, Shea: To the friends we'll see no more."

Dan Shea drank. The whisky was hot in mouth and throat and the water that followed it was lukewarm and insipid. Replacing his glass on the bar he listened to the men outside. Fitzpatrick, having taken his drink, had replaced his glass and turned so that his back was to the bar and his face to the door.

"The off-leader's lame," a hoarse voice said. "Picked up a stone, I reckon."

AT THE table, the three men, finished with their meal, had risen. Now they moved, edging along the table until they reached its end, and stopped. Rough men, bearded, booted, each armed, they gathered at the table end and stood in such a formation that a triangle existed in the room, the door its apex and the base reaching between the bar and the table. The door darkened and the station manager filled it, his head turned so that he talked over his shoulder to a man outside.

"There's no express," the manager said, and came on in, walking around the end of his desk and pausing behind it. "I've got a sack of mail, though."

The stage guard, a stranger to Dan Shea, followed the manager, crossing to the desk and pausing before it, his back to the door. He leaned his elbows on the desk and then for a third time the doorway darkened.

Dan Shea had observed these things, not with interest but as a habit. He saw the man in the door, small, neatly dressed. The new arrival looked quickly to right and left with beady black eyes. A wisp of black mustache beneath his long nose completed so apparent a likeness that Dan Shea almost laughed. Here was a mouse: one of those small, indefinite people who cling to the side of buildings as they walk, ready, always, to seek safety in a hole. The man took a step from the doorway and at the table one of the three diners said: "That's him."

Instantly Dan Shea turned. At the end of the table the three men had gone into action. Their weapons were in their hands and even as Dan looked toward them the little room rocked with the reverberation of the shots.

At the door the mousy man staggered back, one small claw of a hand coming up as though it could ward off the heavy lead that jerked and tugged and slammed into his slight body. Fitzpatrick had leaped away and was crouched against the wall, and Dan Shea, staring at the falling man beside the door, became aware that the direction of fire had changed and that he himself was in the center of it.

On the bar the whisky bottle broke and the liquor splashed, and Fitzpatrick was

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yelling: "Down, Shea. Get down fast!"

Dan dropped to his knees. His own weapon kicked sharply in his hand and the smell of smoke was sharp and acrid in his nostrils. The little man lay beside the door and the three murderers were running, almost trampling the body in their haste. Fitzpatrick brushed against Dan, upsetting him as he made for the vacant doorway, and Dan, regaining his feet, followed toward the square of light.

Just outside the door Fitzpatrick crouched, his left arm raised, a long black gun leveled across it. Toward the corral there was a hitching rack and at it horses milled as men mounted. Fitzpatrick fired, once and then again. Dan Shea raised his own weapon and took careful sight.

Above the sharp ridge of the foresight a figure appeared momentarily. Shea's gun bounced and settled, bounced again, and on his horse a man lurched forward, clutching at the saddle. Then horses and men were gone, wheeling sharply about the end of the adobe-walled corral, and Dan Shea lowered his gun.

Fitzpatrick had straightened and was standing just beyond Dan, staring at the corner of the corral. For perhaps a full minute he stood there and then, turning, looked at Dan Shea.

"You hit one that last shot," Fitzpatrick said almost casually. "Looked like you hurt him bad."

Dan's mouth was dry, his tongue seeming to cling to its roof. "They were waiting for him," he said quickly.

"Sure they were." Fitzpatricks' voice was gruff. "He never had a chance. Came through the door and walked right into it. Well—"

THEY turned then, acting on common impulse, and went back into the station. The mousy man lay beside the door, just where he had fallen. The station manager was bending over him and the shotgun guard and the driver stood staring down.

Over by the table two women hovered: the cook and the waitress. The waitress had picked up a soiled dish and was holding it. As Dan Shea came through the door the driver said: "He was goin' to Albuquerque. That's all I know."

"They got away," Fitzpatrick announced, replacing his weapon in its holster under his coat. "My pardner here hit one when they went around the corner of the corral."

Dan was suddenly aware of his own gun, heavy in his hand. He lifted it, sliding it down into place beneath his arm. Over behind the bar the native bartender showed the round moon of his face as he came up from hiding. The station manager, rising, made an unnecessary statement.

"He's dead."

The waitress dropped her plate, screamed, and threw her apron up over her head, turning blindly and banging against the table as she made toward the kitchen door. Behind Dan Shea men arrived: the driver of the El Paso stage, the guard, and the hostlers. They pushed Dan aside, their hands rough and their voices hoarse as they asked questions. The station man looked at them.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know just what happened. I was gettin' the mail sack for Charlie when it started."

"He walked in and they just went to shootin'," Fitzpatrick stated. "Just like that."

Dan looked at the man on the floor. He was a dead mouse now, an inoffensive, harmless, little dead animal. The black mustache was very dark above his lip and the beady eyes had lost all their sharpness.

"I don't know who they were," the station manager said, answering a question. "They just came in an' ordered dinner. I don't know who they were."

The guard of the west-bound stage, the drivers, the hostlers, the east-bound messenger who had been at the desk, even the station manager who had stopped for the mail bag, were full of questions. The drivers and the hostlers had been in the corral when they heard the shots. Wisely

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they had remained behind the protection of the thick adobe walls. They had not seen what happened, either inside or outside the station.

As always, in aftermath, each man spoke, identifying his part in this tragedy, placing himself as to time and location during its occurrence, so concerned with his own small part that it became of preëmient importance in his recital. Dan Shea leaned against the wall, not looking at the dead man but watching the others, tension easing out of him. Fitzpatrick, too, was relaxing. He answered the questions that poured in upon him, his words brief, sharp, terse. No one could identify the men who had been at the table. No one could identify the dead man.

"His grip's on the coach," the east-bound driver said. "I'll get it." He went out.

"No," Fitzpatrick answered a hostler's question, "we weren't with him. We're headed west. We just came in for a drink and to eat dinner."

The driver came back lugging a heavy telescope grip. He dumped it down on the floor. "You think we ought to open it?" he asked doubtfully.

"The sheriff'll open it," the station manager answered. "You get hold of him as soon as you get to Bendicion, Bill. Tell him what happened."

"What are you goin' to do with him?" The driver gestured to the body. "You want me to take him in?"

The stage man shook his head. "We'll keep him for the sheriff," he answered. "Juan, you an' Lucero get him out. Take him down to the feed room an' wrap him in a tarp. Fitz, you'll tell the sheriff when you get to town. You an' this gentleman seen it all, didn't you?" His eyes sought Dan Shea.

Dan nodded. The hostlers were lifting the body, one at the head, the other at the feet. Dan moved aside to give them passageway.

"The stage company ain't responsible," the station man stated. "You know that? You saw what happened?"

"We'll tell Youtsey all about it," Fitzpatrick agreed. He had joined Dan and was standing beside him.

The station manager was brisk. "You gents certainly took a hand," he commended them. "They shot at you, too. Smashed a bottle right beside you." He looked at Dan Shea. "Well, we'll get the teams changed. You want some dinner?"

Dan Shea shook his head. Fitzpatrick said, "No," and then in a drawling voice: "I've kind of lost my appetite."

The west-bound driver was tugging at one heavy glove. "Get the teams changed," he said harshly. "I don't want no dinner neither. We'll go on."

Dan Shea took his eyes from the little pool of blood that the mousy man had left on the floor. He looked at Fitzpatrick.

"A hell of a thing," Fitzpatrick said. "Wasn't it a hell of a thing?"

IN THE stage, the coach rocking on the thick leather of the thoroughbraces, Dan Shea and Fitzpatrick were silent. They looked out the window as the road turned, watching the stage station, its few trees, the long adobe walls of the corrals dwindle and become a child's plaything in the distance.

When the road turned again and the station was gone from sight, they sat, each staring moodily at the feet of the other. Atop the coach, the driver, the messenger seated beside him, spoke to his teams, urging them along, finding relief in his accustomed business. Dan Shea and Fitzpatrick were denied that relief.

The coach lurched down into a wash and climbed out of it. Methodically, as though he had just found something to do, Fitzpatrick produced his long weapon from its holster, looked at it for a moment and then placing the hammer at half-cock, opened the loading gate and pushed out four spent shells. The empty cartridge cases tinkled as they fell to the floor of the stage. From his belt he refilled the cylinder.

Dan Shea did the same with his own shorter gun. Fitzpatrick dangled his weapon between his knees and, lifting his eyes from it, looked at Dan.

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"Happened quick," Fitzpatrick commented.

"It did," Dan agreed.

"I missed every shot." The saloon keeper looked down at his gun again. "You were in line with me when it started."

Dan made no answer. After a long interval Fitzpatrick spoke again. "They must have wanted him bad."

"Bad," Dan assented.

"He never knew what happened."

"No."

Fitzpatrick shrugged and put away his gun. "You ain't a bad kind to have along," he praised. "You started quick."

"They took a shot or two at us."

Silence in the coach for a moment, broken only by the sounds of the trotting horses and the rattle of the wheels.

"I wonder why they wanted him," Fitzpatrick mused. "He didn't look like the kind that gets in trouble, did he?"

"No, he didn't."

Across from Dan, Fitzpatrick straightened his shoulders. "I don't like to get mixed up in a thing like that," he announced. "I run a good, peaceful place in Bendicíon. Trouble is bad for my business."

"Any kind of business," Dan amended. "Well, the sheriff will ask questions."

"An' we'll answer 'em," Fitzpatrick said. He was quiet for a moment, absorbed in his thoughts, then his eyes met Dan's.

"As cold a deck as was ever dealt," Fitzpatrick said. "He never had a chance."

"No," Dan Shea agreed slowly. "He didn't. He surely didn't."

CHAPTER II

WHO KILLED THE MOUSE?

BENDICÍON was built about a plaza shaded by towering cottonwoods, their leaves small green elf-ears. About the plaza, brown adobes squatted, and overtowering the adobes and the plaza but not of them, a twin-spired mission raised its crosses skyward.

At a corner of the square, not on the plaza itself but withdrawn from it, was a courthouse, and an acequia gurgled pleasantly beneath a bridge, bringing water to the cottonwoods and to the grass of the enclosure. Evening had brought surcease from the heat and brilliant sunlight of the day, and here and there beneath the awnings that porched the adobes, a lamp glowed yellow and pleasant.

Dan Shea—the dust of travel removed and a hearty supper past—issued from the hotel upon the street and looked to right and left before choosing his course. He had, since his arrival, spent a good deal of time at the courthouse where with Fitzpatrick he had informed the sheriff of the happenings at the Santa Lucia stage station.

It was evident at once that Fitzpatrick and Youtsey, the officer, were not on good terms. Leaving the courthouse, Fitzpatrick had explained briefly. "I was against him for sheriff last election."

Now, with evening all about, Dan stood in Bendicíon's plaza and glanced up at the light-burnished sky, at the cottonwoods and at the twin spires; then, turning deliberately, he walked along the street.

Fitzpatrick's saloon carried his name above the door. Dan went in, pausing after he had entered and surveying the room. The saloon was not pretentious. There were many other places along Bendicíon's dusty plaza that vaunted more and brighter lights, louder voices and greater size.

Bendicíon drew her substance from the mines in the hills to the west, from the little farms along the river, and from the stock country north and east. An odd conglomeration of a town, Bendicíon could afford amusement of any caliber, goods of almost any kind.

Fitzpatrick's saloon plainly catered to a quiet trade. There was a bar along one side of the room, a back-bar liberally stocked with glasses and bottled goods, and, beyond the bar, three tables. Fitzpatrick, coat gone now and vest hanging open, came from the bar to greet Dan Shea at the door.

Dan was introduced to Fitzpatrick's bartender and then the two men seated themselves at a table. The bartender, assured that it was too soon after supper for a

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drink, returned to his post and Fitzpatrick, leaning back in his chair, surveyed his companion.

"They treat you all right at the hotel?" he asked.

Dan nodded, and Fitzpatrick, finding a cigar, proffered it, bit the end from another and scratched a sulfur match against his boot sole. "How do you like Bendicion?" he questioned around the cigar. "Pretty good town?"

"A pretty good town," Dan agreed.

Men drifted in to the saloon: two townsmen ordered beer; three cowmen came in and paused at the end of the bar. The bartender served them, and Dan Shea puffed his good Havana and let the smoke trail up.

"A pretty good town," he said again.

"Halfway between Albuquerque an' El Paso," Fitzpatrick stated. "There's lots of minin'. It would be a good town to settle in." He looked narrowly at his companion.

"I—" Dan began, and checked.

SAM YOUTSEY, the sheriff, had come through the door, and nodding briefly to the cowboys, he advanced toward the table.

Youtsey stopped beside Shea and Fitzpatrick, pulled out a chair and sat down. "I sent a wagon out for the body," he announced without preamble. "It ought to be in tomorrow."

Fitzpatrick nodded gravely and Dan inched his chair around so that he more fully faced the officer.

The sheriff looked at Dan Shea. "What's your business here, Mr. Shea?" he asked bluntly.

Dan was slow in replying. The question broke the ethics of the time and country. A man's business was private until he chose to announce it. Still, the interest of the sheriff was official rather than personal.

"I'm looking for some sheep that can be bought reasonably," Dan said. "Do you know of any?"

Youtsey thought a moment before replying. "Sheep?" he said, when he spoke.

"I said sheep."

Youtsey looked at Fitzpatrick and seemed to smile. "You don't look like a sheepman," he commented, turning back to Dan.

"But sheep are what I'm interested in." Dan lifted his eyes from the sheriff. At the bar the cowboys were listening. Youtsey shifted in his chair.

"Figgerin' to locate?" he asked.

"I just want to buy some sheep," Dan drawled.

"Well," Youtsey's admission was grudging, "there's some sheep in the country. I could spare 'em, I guess, if you wanted to take 'em out." He grinned appreciatively at his little joke. "The la Luz folks got some an' you might find some sheep at El Puerto del Sol. Don Martin O'Connor might let you have some."

"Don Martin O'Connor?" Dan echoed the words.

"That's his name," Youtsey said. "He owns El Puerto del Sol. Yeah, I guess you could find some sheep there."

"Whereabouts is it?" Dan leaned forward.

"East." The sheriff waved a vague hand. "Mail hack goes out there. O'Connor's headquarters are on the star route."

"When does the hack leave?"

"Tomorrow." The sheriff paused. "We're goin' to hold an inquest tomorrow mornin', too. I came to tell you. About eight o'clock. You be there." He included Fitzpatrick in his glance. The saloon keeper nodded.

"At the courthouse," Youtsey added, and stood up. He nodded to Fitzpatrick, glanced at Dan, and then walked toward the door, stopping to speak briefly to the cowmen at the bar.

When Youtsey was gone, Fitzpatrick grunted. "The sheriff," he drawled, "is quite a joker."

"How do you mean?" Dan asked.

Fitzpatrick did not answer that question. "Why didn't you tell me you wanted to buy some sheep?" he asked. "I could have steered you."

"I came down tonight to talk to you about it." Dan Shea smiled.

"Oh!" Fitzpatrick seemed mollified.

"Do you," Dan spoke slowly, "think I

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might pick up some sheep from O'Connor?"

Fitzpatrick's eyes narrowed in thought. "Don Martin," he drawled, "is a pretty hard citizen. Nobody around here likes him much. There's other places where you might get sheep easier."

"But O'Connor's got 'em?"

"He's got plenty." The saloon keeper appeared to be lost in thought. "Why don't you try some place else?" he asked suddenly. "O'Connor—" Fitzpatrick broke off abruptly.

"It's the closest place, I take it," Dan answered. "What I want is sheep. I'm not interested in the kind of man I get 'em from."

Up at the end of the bar one of the cowpunchers spoke, lifting his voice until the words were plain. "Let's git out of here. I never could stand the smell of a lousy sheepman."

Dan Shea flushed. Fitzpatrick lifted his head and looked at the speaker, his stare long and slow and hard.

"If I bother your business—" Dan began, shifting as though to rise.

"Set still," Fitzpatrick rasped, continuing to stare at the men.

"It does kinda stink in here," another of the three agreed.

Fitzpatrick got up. "Get out then," he said definitely. "Down at the honkytonks where you belong. Go on down there!" The saloonman's voice was hard, rasping. Dan Shea had seen Fitzpatrick in action. Fitzpatrick, he judged, was a pretty salty citizen, a man capable of looking after things.

"Go on!" Fitzpatrick ordered curtly.

At the end of the bar the cowboys hesitated. They were drunk enough to be ugly. Fitzpatrick moved away from the table and took a step. One of the cowboys put money on the bar.

"It'll be a damned long time before we're back," he snapped, glaring at Fitzpatrick.

"It won't be half long enough!" Fitzpatrick told him.

The cowboys went out, one of them clinking change defiantly in his hand. Fitzpatrick sat down. "I've been wantin' to do that," he drawled.

Dan made no comment. There was something between Fitzpatrick and the men who had gone out, some old quarrel half-settled.

"Have a glass of beer," Fitzpatrick invited.

The bartender brought the beer. Dan and Fitzpatrick sat drinking it, sipping slowly. The beer was not quite warm, not quite cold. "I can't get ice in here," Fitzpatrick said. "Have to keep the beer in the cellar."

Dan nodded.

THE evening business had begun. Men filtered into the saloon, stepping up to the bar, speaking to Fitzpatrick, asking him concerning his trip. Dan Shea sat at the table, his fingers touching his beer glass, watching the men, watching Fitzpatrick.

There was more to Fitzpatrick than there was to the ordinary run of saloon keepers. Dan liked the man, recognizing his strength. Fitzpatrick, he thought idly, would do to take along. He would make a hand.

"You didn't tell Youtsey that you wanted to locate here," Fitzpatrick said suddenly.

"I don't, really," Dan answered. "I want to trail sheep north. There's a market in Colorado. I need to make a little money. The panic wiped me out."

"It's made hard times every place," Fitzpatrick agreed. "I—" He stopped. Dan Shea was looking toward the door, his face set in harsh, hard lines.

Two newcomers were in the doorway, poised there, filling the opening. One was short, broad, with flaxen yellow hair and a blond mustache. The other, taller and dark, was plainly a native. Dan Shea stared at the blond man.

"You know him?" Fitzpatrick asked curiously.

"I know him!" Dan Shea answered shortly.

In his mind was recollection. There was heat and the hard, sharp sounds of battle all about him. Brush surrounded him, too, lying in a tangle all about, and beside Dan sprawled a man in a blue uniform: Ashland Davies, his friend. Davies was bleeding out his life. For the moment Dan Shea was

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back in the Wilderness fight. He could almost smell the powder smoke.

"I take it you don't like Delaney," Fitzpatrick drawled.

Dan did not answer. Delaney and his companion had left the door and were coming toward the table. Delaney was looking at Fitzpatrick. His eyes left the saloon keeper's gaze and met Dan Shea's. For an instant George Delaney stopped short, then a smile broke across his face and he came on, his hand outstretched.

"Dan Shea!" All the warmth of greeting was in Delaney's voice. "I never thought I'd see you here. I never expected to see you again!"

Dan did not move. He ignored the outstretched hand and his eyes bit into Delaney's.

"You never expected to see me any place, Delaney," he said softly. "Not after you'd left me to die!"

Delaney had stopped beside the table. He lowered his hand slowly. "Why, Dan . . ." Delaney began.

Dan Shea spoke with bitter precision. "You pulled out! You knew that Davies was dying and you knew that I was hurt. You heard me call you and you never came back. You damned coward!"

Delaney's eyes would not meet Dan's own. Dan Shea went on, his voice passionless. "Davies died. I spent the next six months in a hospital. I looked for you after I got out. I wanted to tell you what kind of a skunk you are, Delaney!"

A hot flush suffused George Delaney's cheeks. "I didn't hear you call," he evaded. "I—"

"That's a lie!" Dan Shea said flatly, and waited.

THE color drained slowly from Delaney's face. For an instant he remained, confronting Dan Shea, and then he wavered, half-turning toward the bar. The native with him took a half step and glared down at Dan, his eyes hostile. "*Señor* . . ." he began.

"You're in poor company," Dan Shea said coldly, and looked at Delaney again. Delaney completed his turn. He said: "Come on, Ramon," over his shoulder and without a blackward glance, started to the door. The native paused, undecided, then wheeling swiftly, followed Delaney. The barroom was still quiet after they had gone out. Dan let his shoulders relax until they touched the back of his chair.

"You said you knew him," Fitzpatrick drawled. "I take it he knew you, too. All right. We'll have another drink over here."

Dan shook his head. "I'll get out," he said thickly. "I'm going back to the hotel." He rose wearily to his feet. Fitzpatrick looked at the bartender who had moved to serve them.

"Let the drink go," he instructed. "I'll walk back to the hotel with you, Shea."

Outside the saloon the street was quiet enough. A wind was rustling the little leaves of the plaza's cottonwoods. Dan Shea, walking toward the hotel, Fitzpatrick beside him, hardly heard the wind. His mind was still filled with the cold anger. Fitzpatrick strolled along, unhurried, and perforce Dan's gait matched that of his companion.

"Want to talk about it?" Fitzpatrick asked.

Words broke from Dan Shea, rushing over the dam of his mind. "He left the best friend I ever had—to die! It was in the Battle of the Wilderness an' we were trapped. I couldn't get Davies out alone. I called to Delaney—"

"An' he never looked back," Fitzpatrick drawled. "I've thought there was somethin' wrong with George Delaney."

"I said I'd kill him!" Dan did not heed Fitzpatrick's interpolation. "I swore I'd kill him if I saw him again."

Fitzpatrick's drawl was soothing. "You couldn't do it."

Dan Shea stopped short in his stride. "I swore I would," he confessed.

Fitzpatrick's level voice blended with the murmur of the wind. "You couldn't do it," he repeated. "You ain't the kind of man that can do a killin'. I know you've got nerve, Shea, but you ain't the kind that can step out an' drop a man cold. He's got to fight back."

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They resumed their walking, Dan Shea moodily silent. A corner was turned, a street crossed, and they were almost at the hotel.

"You didn't do Delaney any good," Fitzpatrick said. "You didn't help him none. The talk will be all around town."

Still Dan said nothing. Fitzpatrick spoke again. "An' you didn't help your business any. That fellow with Delaney was Ramon de la Luz. Delaney does some business for Ramon an' they're pretty thick. I guess you won't get any de la Luz sheep, Shea."

The saloon man pondered a moment. They had stopped in front of the hotel now. "Most folks," he drawled, "like Delaney. He's got a pretty good business here. Does some law work an' sells some land, an' so on."

"Everybody always liked him," Dan said shortly.

"Until they found out about him, huh?" Fitzpatrick commented. "Well, good night, Shea."

"Good night," Dan Shea answered, and entered the hotel.

CHAPTER III

IRISH GRANDEE

THE mail hack for the east left Bendicion at noon. Dan Shea, climbing into the spring wagon beside the driver, felt the fierce tug of the morning sun even in the semi-shade of the plaza. He had spent the morning at the courthouse, listening to Youtsey and Bendicion's justice of the peace conduct an inquest, and he was glad now to have that experience behind him.

The little man who had been killed at the Santa Lucia stage station was named Maples. So much had been ascertained from the letters found in his pocket. Other identification there was none. The letters had come from the East, one from Boston, another from a town in Vermont, and were addressed to Santa Fé. Their contents shed no light on Maples, his connections, or his business.

One, apparently, came from a relative. It was signed *Lovingly, Aunt Cora,* but aside from the postmark there was no address. The other letter, from Boston, was evidently a reply to some request Maples had made. It quoted prices on suits.

The manager of the stage station, who had come in for the inquest, was apologetic concerning Maples' telescope grip. "That damned Lucero," the manager said, "sloped with it."

Lucero, the manager further stated, was a halfbreed Mescalero Apache. He had been hired as a hostler at Santa Lucia. Aside from that the manager knew nothing of Lucero's antecedents or of where he had gone. "Them Indians," the stage man said, "will take anything that ain't nailed down. I guess Lucero seen the clothes an' truck in that grip an' figgered that he wanted 'em. Anyhow he pulled out with it sometime last night."

Youtsey spoke his mind concerning the slackness at the station, letting the station man know just what he thought of such carelessness; but there was nothing that the sheriff could do about it. The grip was gone.

Fitzpatrick had come down to the post office to see Dan off. He stood leaning on the wheel beside Dan while the driver attended to last-minute details. Dan, comfortable on the seat, his coat removed and folded beside him, settled his hat so that it shaded his eyes, and grinned down at the saloon man.

"I'll be back," he assured. "Tomorrow or the next day. I'll see what there is at El Puerto del Sol and if I don't find what I want I'll come right back here."

Fitzpatrick nodded, his blue eyes gloomy. "They're goin' to bury Maples this afternoon," he said. "He won't keep in this weather an' I guess they've got to bury him right away, but it kind of seems a shame somehow."

"Youtsey," Dan commented dryly, "don't seem to be much stirred up over a murder. He's taking it pretty easy, it seems to me. Well, we did what we could anyhow. We're not officers."

"No," Fitzpatrick agreed. "We ain't. Here comes the driver. You take care of

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yourself, Shea. I'll be lookin' for you back."

They gripped hands briefly and Fitzpatrick retreated to the front of the post office while the driver climbed into the seat and gathered up the lines. Under his urging the horses eased into the collars and the spring wagon rolled away. When Dan looked back, Fitzpatrick was still beside the post office, leaning against the wall, a solitary, inscrutable figure.

PULLING out of Bendicíon, the mail wagon came to the long wooden bridge that stretched across the Rio Grande. The horses' feet thumped on the planking and the wheels rumbled. Beyond the bridge was the desert and the road climbed slowly toward a mesa top.

On either side of the road the country stretched away, rock and sand dotted with the hardy desert growths, and behind them the river lay, a green-flanked serpent in the brown earth. Catsclaw, mesquite, greasewood lined the road, here and there interspersed with sparse grass. The sun beat down and the horses walked steadily.

"Goin' to El Puerto del Sol?" the driver asked.

Dan nodded.

"Goin' to buy some sheep?"

It was apparent that Dan's business had been discussed in the town that morning. Dan nodded again.

"Ol' Don Martin ain't apt to sell you any," the driver stated, and spat expertly over a wheel.

"Why not?"

"Because he ain't." A brief pause, then: "He don't sell to nobody around here."

Dan waited. Apparently the driver was going to pass out information. The driver did. "Don Martin O'Connor," he drawled. "He married one of the Alarid girls. That's how come him to have El Puerto."

"Whereabouts is it?" Dan asked.

"Right ahead," the driver answered. "We'll be on Grant land pretty quick. El Puerto del Sol reaches from back of the Alforjas clear down to Alamo Creek. Soon as we cross the creek we're on Don Martin's land."

"It's an old Spanish Grant?" Dan asked.

"Older 'n the hills. The Alarids have had it ever since the year one."

"It takes in lots of country?"

"From Point of Rocks on south to the Pope's Nose." Again the driver pointed with his whip. "I don't know how many acres. Neither does anybody else." The driver paused a moment and spat, then continued: "It used to take in more country, but O'Connor sold the north end to the YH outfit. They run cattle. Louder an' O'Connor been fightin' ever since Louder bought the land."

"So?" Dan pried for more information.

"Yeah. Nobody gets along with O'Connor except the *paisanos* that work for him. He's meaner 'n a damned snake."

There was a contemplative pause and then the driver spoke again. "I got to hand it to him, though: He's kept El Puerto del Sol together. The Alarids was about to lose it. O'Connor got the place on its feet when he made that sale."

For a little time the wagon rolled along in silence. Dan Shea was thinking about the information he had received. O'Connor, from all that Dan had heard, bore a bad reputation. Perhaps Dan had been wiser to attempt his purchase at some other source. As though sensing the thought, the driver said: "He'll treat you all right. The ol' man's a gentleman. He's just tough to do business with."

"What time will we get in?" Shea asked after a time.

"Along sometime this evenin'. I lay over at El Puerto tonight an' come back tomorrow. There's another driver takes the mail on east. Hot today, ain't it?"

Dan nodded and the driver lapsed into silence. The wagon rolled steadily ahead toward the hills that the driver had called "the Alforjas." As though reading Dan's thoughts the driver said: "Some call 'em the Packsaddle Mountains."

THE horses finished a climb, paused at the top to breathe, and then began a descent. Below them a creek stretched away

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to north and south, curving, at the south, toward the Rio Grande.

"Alamo Creek," the driver announced needlessly. The tall cottonwoods along the creek had disclosed its identity.

In the stream the team stood and drank, and Dan Shea, climbing down, refreshed himself upstream from the animals. When man and horses had finished, the journey resumed.

"Grant land now," the driver remarked.

The country seemed lifeless. Now and again a lizard ran scurrying across the road. Once a Chaparral cock, *el paisano* to the natives, appeared, his wings half-spread as he ran along ahead of the team.

"They always want a race," the driver drawled. "Them road runners can cover country fast as a horse."

Behind them the sun lowered toward the west. Their shadows marched before them, growing longer and more gaunt. The driver took a fresh chew and proffered Dan the plug. "Some folks," he drawled, still speaking of the bird, "say that they'll locate a snake an' pile cactus around it an' make a corral so the rattler can't git out. I've never seen it myself."

"What's that?" Dan Shea demanded suddenly.

Off to the left there was motion. A mounted man appeared, small against the skyline, his horse running full out. As always, Dan Shea was impressed with distance. The mounted man was a bobbing doll and the running horse seemed barely to move against the expanse of space; yet Dan Shea knew that the horse was swift and that it was the distance that lent the seeming slowness. The driver pulled his team to a halt.

"That's the Duke," he said. "We'll wait a minute. He's headed this way. Mebbe we'll see somethin'."

"The Duke?" Dan echoed.

"Name's Perrier. We call him the Duke. He's an Englishman."

"What—" Dan began, and stopped. Horse and rider were coming on, turned now so that their course would intersect the road. They grew in size rapidly. Before the team, two hundred yards away, a running wolf broke into the road, body low, tail carried between flying legs.

The wolf disappeared and, almost instantly, his place was filled. There were four dogs that followed the wolf, great shaggy creatures running silently as the wolf had run, their heads flung forward, so intent on their quarry that they did not see the horses or the wagon. The dogs, too, disappeared into the brush, crowned out of it over a ridge in the sand and were gone.

"Here he comes!" There was excitement in the driver's voice.

Now, on the road, were the horse and rider. Dan had a glimpse, photographic in its clearness, of a small man, bolt upright in a saddle; of a magnificent horse that cleared the road at a leap, the rider seeming a part of the mount. For an instant horse and man were framed in the road and then they too were gone into the brush and over the ridge. The driver gathered up his lines. "He'll get that wolf, too," the driver assured.

"But what—" Dan questioned.

"That's what he does," the driver explained. "The Duke ain't got any particular place to stay. He's got a wagon an' a camp outfit an' he moves around with his dogs. He's got four of 'em, an' some of the best horses in the world, I guess. He's kind of crazy. The ranchmen pay him a bounty on the wolves he gets. Pretty near every time you see him he's ridin' with his dogs. Geddup! You, Buck, geddup!"

"He junts hunts wolves?" Dan asked.

"Wolves an' coyotes. Won't shoot 'em. He hunts 'em horseback. Ever so often he comes into town. I guess he gets some money from the old country. Anyhow that's what folks say."

"Oh." The situation was clear to Dan Shea now. Here and there in his travels, he had met men who "got money from the old country." Most of them were no good. Dan Shea, having met them, could readily understand why they had been sent away. Of course there were exceptions, but . . .

Again the driver seemed to read Dan's

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thoughts. "The Duke's all right," he said. "He's high an' mighty an' he don't talk much, but he's all right." Having made that statement, the driver again lapsed into taciturnity.

THE road went on. As it climbed toward the hills the country improved. The sand and rock, the desert growth, was left behind and grass supplanted it. Dan saw sheep, the herder sitting on a hillside, apparently asleep.

The sheep were in good flesh and, to Dan Shea's expert eyes, of good breeding as well. The mountains approached and the sun was lower in the sky. Then again the greening tops of trees came into view, the road mounted a rise, turned, and began a descent. Before them a settlement appeared.

"El Puerto del Sol," the driver announced. "That's the big house up on the hill. That's where you'll go."

"Isn't there a hotel?" Dan asked. "Can't I get a place to stop?"

"Everybody goes to Don Martin's," the driver answered. "There ain't no hotel or nothin' else. Don Martin owns it all. Whoa, Buck. Whoa!" The wagon drew to a halt.

Dan looked around curiously.

There were adobes clustered about, small houses that settled, familiar and friendly, against the earth from which they had been made. A bright-eyed boy came running from the nearest dwelling and a man, gray-grizzled, walked out from a door and approached the wagon. The driver greeted the oldster.

"*Buenas tardes,* Jesus."

"*Buenas tardes,*" Jesus answered. Dan Shea climbed down from the wagon seat. The driver spoke fluently, explaining that Dan Shea had come from Bendicion.

"Eusabio," Jesus called. "*Ven aca.*"

The boy answered, joining the three men. To him Jesus spoke again, directing that Dan Shea be taken to the hacienda. Dan Shea lifted his grip and rifle from the back of the wagon. The boy took them from his hands, his eyes bright as he handled the rifle, and said: "Come, *señor,*" and led the way toward an opening between the buildings.

"You'll be all right," the driver assured Dan. "Don Martin will look after you, Mr. Shea. If you want to go back tomorrow I'll be leavin' about noon."

"Thanks," Dan answered, and followed his guide.

Don Martin's hacienda was on the low rise above the clustered adobes. It was built square, around a patio, and there was a low and long *portal* across its front. At the entrance, the boy Eusabio set down Dan's grip and lifted a heavy iron knocker, letting it fall to echo resoundingly.

Within moments there was a shuffle of footsteps and an old man appeared. He smiled benignly at Dan, listened casually to Eusabio's explanation and picking up the grip and gun, led the way into the patio. Dan followed. Seemingly at random his guide selected a door, opened it and gestured to Dan to enter.

The guide placed the grip inside the door, leaned the rifle against the jamb, smiled again and announced that Don Martin was with the sheep and that *el señor* had but to call if he wished anything for his comfort. With that the old man shuffled away and Dan Shea, taking off his coat, set about removing some of the stains of travel. When he had finished he resumed the coat and went out into the patio.

Sundown had come. There was a mocking bird in the cottonwood tree that grew in the center of the patio. Dan Shea, seating himself on a bench, looked up at the bird and listened. The *patio* was cool and calm and the bird's notes were liquid and softly sweet. When the mocker ceased his music Dan Shea pursed his lips and whistled, and in the tree the bird cocked his head to listen.

From behind Dan a voice said: "He does not know that song. Listen." The words were followed by the liquid whistle of a quail. In the tree the mocker half spread his wings, lowered them and hopped along his branch.

Again the quail whistled and now the bird in the tree answered.

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DAN SHEA turned. There was a girl standing just under the shadow of the gallery behind him. He could see her face in the dusk, could see her dark eyes, the wealth of red-gold hair that made a misty halo about her head.

She was tall for a woman, with wide full lips and high cheekbones. Her skin was gold, whether from the sun or from the rich blood that coursed beneath it, Dan could not tell. But she was altogether beautiful, as she stood there, and Dan Shea caught his breath and felt his heart pound.

"You see?" the girl asked. "He knows that song." Up in the tree the mocker whistled the quail call again.

Dan got up from the bench. Turning, he bowed to the girl. "I am Dan Shea," he said. "I've come to see Don Martin O'Connor."

The girl curtsied prettily. "I am Marillita O'Connor," she answered. "I make you welcome, *señor*."

There was a moment of awkward silence. How, Dan wondered, does one address divinity? From the front of the house there came noises, the tramp of feet, the sounds of a gruff voice speaking in Spanish. The door to the patio opened and a giant of a man stood framed in the opening. Marillita ran toward the giant and his arms swept her from her feet. Dan Shea stood watching.

The big man placed the girl on the ground and, holding her hand, came forward. Dan could see the resemblance now: the gray hair still tinged with its ruddy youth, the bold line of nose and face that in the girl was softened. He advanced a step. "Don Martin O'Connor?" he asked.

"The same," the giant rumbled.

"I am Dan Shea."

A smile broke across the crags of the man's face. "Shea, is it?" he demanded. "Irish by the look and name of you."

"My father came from Limerick," Dan Shea said.

Martin O'Connor's great hand engulfed Dan's, closing down until all the blood was drained from the fingers.

"A Limerick man and named Shea! Mary, here's a rare one. Come now, Mr. Shea. This is my daughter, Marillita, and what have you to say to that?"

Dan bowed again. There was nothing that he could say. The girl's laughter rippled and Dan Shea flushed.

"H'mmm," Martin O'Connor said dryly. "Ye've met then. What good luck brings you to us, Mr. Shea?"

"I wanted to see you on a business matter."

O'Connor shook his head. "It's always business," he complained. "After supper we'll attend to it. Mary, keep the young man company while I set myself to rights. We're lambin', Mr. Shea, an' it's a tryin', dirtyin' job, it is." With that he nodded to Dan and walked across the patio, entering a door on the further side. Marillita O'Connor seated herself upon the bench and smiled up at Dan Shea.

"How does a girl go about keeping a young man company?" she asked archly.

Dan Shea sat down. "She sits and looks beautiful," he answered, smiling.

"Then I'm afraid I can't obey my father. I can sit—"

"And to look beautiful is something you can't help," Dan interrupted.

"Is the Blarney Stone in Limerick, Mr. Shea?"

"I've never seen the Blarney Stone nor Limerick either. It's just the truth I speak."

The girl's laughter rilled like sparkling water. "Now I know you've seen them both," she declared. "You've kissed the Blarney Stone, too."

"No Blarney's needed here." Dan's eyes sparkled. "I'm as truthful as I would be on a witness stand."

WHEN Don Martin returned he found his daughter and his guest sitting on either end of the bench, their eyes bright and laughter on their lips. Before he joined them, Don Martin paused a moment on the gallery, smiling at the scene.

Supper was a leisurely meal eaten overlooking the patio. There were servants, deft and soft-footed, to attend them, and the talk was of Ireland. O'Connor harked back into his memories and the girl and the

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young man listened. Then when the meal was done and a lamp had been brought and placed on the table, O'Connor leaned back in his big chair and stared shrewdly at Dan Shea.

"You mentioned a matter of business," he prompted.

"I did, sir," Dan answered. "I've come down from Colorado and I've a plan that will make some money."

"Get on with it." O'Connor's voice was gruff.

"There are settlers coming into the San Luis Valley," Dan Shea said. "All of southern Colorado is being settled. It's a sheep country and they need sheep. I plan to supply them."

"So?" The don's great bushy eyebrows lifted. "It's a sheepman you are then?"

"I know sheep," Dan answered briefly. "I plan to get sheep in the New Mexico Territory and drive them north. The market's good and there's money in the scheme."

"And you want to buy sheep from me?"

Dan moved his hands in a little negative gesture. "I've no money to buy sheep," he said frankly. "The panic wiped me out. I want a partner in the business."

"Me, for instance?"

"It looks foolish for me to talk this way, Don Martin." Dan Shea was very earnest. "But I've friends in Denver, people that no doubt you know. You could write them concerning me."

Martin O'Connor shook his great white head. "I make up my own mind about a man," he proclaimed. "I'll not need to write or ask. I'll need to see. The plan sounds fine, indeed it does." He paused and Dan's hopes rose high. "Except that I've no need of money," O'Connor concluded.

"Then you aren't interested?"

A sly smile twitched at O'Connor's lips beneath his mustache. "I didn't say that," he demurred. "You'll stay a day or two, Mr. Shea, an' we'll talk it over."

Dan nodded.

Don Martin arose ponderously. "Come with me in the mornin', Mr. Shea," he invited. "I'll be busy but we'll have a chance to talk. You've been give a bed, Mr. Shea?"

"Yes, sir." Dan, too, was on his feet.

"The day starts early," O'Connor warned. "I'm for bed. Come, Mary."

Marillita O'Connor flashed a smile at Dan Shea and then, tucking her hand beneath her father's arm, accompanied him. Dan watched them go into the darkness out of the lamplight.

CHAPTER IV

SHEEP LAND

IN THE morning, with all El Puerto del Sol stirring about him, Dan Shea joined Martin O'Connor at breakfast. Marillita did not appear and the two men ate alone and in silence.

After the meal they left the house. A buckboard was ready in front of the barn and Dan climbed into the seat beside his host. Don Martin drove the buckboard toward the east, squarely into the rising sun. Within half an hour after leaving the hacienda they were among the sheep.

The lambing grounds were long hill slopes, warm in the sun and with green grass filling the little draws between them. There were herders with the flocks and the black coals of fires showed that men had been on duty through the night. Their camps were adjacent to the lambing grounds and in those camps men slept.

At each stopping place Don Martin was greeted. There was something of awe, something of respect, and something more of love in the greetings. It was as though Don Martin O'Connor were a feudal lord, a great and well beloved *patrón* and these his serfs. The don asked questions and received answers. He gave directions and received cheerful assurances of obedience.

Dan Shea listened. Once he asked a question of his own and when the buckboard rolled on Don Martin looked at him and asked sharply: "You've the Spanish?"

"I've learned it," Dan Shea answered.

At ten o'clock they were well north and east of the hacienda and here they stopped. There was a large band of ewes and with

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the sheep was but one man and a small boy. Don Martin alighted and went to the sheep. When he came back he was scowling. "Trouble here," he said briefly. "A rascal of a herder ran away, and another's sick. I'll have to help." He reached into the bed of the buckboard as he spoke and pulled out a pair of heavy duck overalls.

Dan Shea got down from the seat. "Have you another pair?" he asked.

A flash of astonishment showed briefly on O'Connor's face and then was gone. "I might find you a pair," he answered, and reached into the buckboard again. Dan Shea, going to the front of the buckboard, leaned forward and unhooked the tugs. When O'Connor came around the team, carrying another pair of overalls, Dan was freeing the neck-yoke and lowering the tongue to the ground.

They tied the team to the wheels of the buckboard. O'Connor sent the boy scurrying over the hill on an errand, and then both men fell to work.

Ewes are not good mothers. When a lamb is born it is necessary to make the ewe claim it. If ever mother and lamb are separated there is trouble. So, at lambing time, sheepmen stay with their flocks, keeping each ewe and newborn lamb segregated so that the ewe will claim her own.

After a time, after the lamb has nursed, after the ewe has been forced to furnish food from her maternal fount, the trouble usually ends. But if the grass is short and the ewe has no milk for her lamb, if they become separated, if any one of a hundred things happens, then there is an orphan and a ewe that has milk but no lamb to take it.

Martin O'Connor and Dan Shea fell to work. Lambs had been born during the night and of these some had been definitely deserted. It was necessary that the lambs and ewes be paired, that the ewes be made to let the lambs nurse; that families, even though they were not mother and offspring, be formed.

It was a trying, wearisome, annoying task, but it had to be done. Dan Shea knew how and so did Martin O'Connor and the *pastór* with the flock. They attacked the job systematically and obstinately. Now and then Martin O'Connor looked up from his own work, across the woolly backs and greening grass to where Dan Shea labored and, after each inspection, he chuckled.

THE boy came back across the hill bringing three men. These, after a word with Don Martin, fell to work and O'Connor, leaving them, came to Dan Shea.

Dan was skinning a dead lamb. Beyond him was a ewe, her udder showing that she had a lamb. Dan, as he skinned the dead animal, kept another little fellow pinned to the earth beneath his leg. He looked up briefly as O'Connor arrived.

"This is her lamb," Dan said, indicating the dead animal with his knife. "She won't take the other."

O'Connor grunted. Dan finished flaying off the pelt, placed the pelt upon the back of the live lamb and tied it there with the dangling strings of hide that had been legs. He released the lamb and it wabbled unsteadily toward the ewe who repulsed it. Dan caught the ewe and held her despite her struggles. When she quieted, the lamb butted his head into her flank and found a teat. The ewe turned her head, nosed the lamb, smelling it, and, apparently either accepting the lamb as her own or acknowledging the inevitable, was quiet. Dan held her a while longer and then released her. She did not drive the lamb away and Dan turned to Don Martin. Martin O'Connor was smiling slyly.

"We can go on now," he said.

Stripped of the duck overalls, back on the comfortable seat of the buckboard, with the country flying by under the rolling wheels, Don Martin made explanation.

"I've eighty thousand sheep," he said abruptly. "About that many, anyhow. Some of them I run myself."

Dan nodded.

"The other sheep," Don Martin continued, watching the backs of the trotting horses, "I put out on shares." He glanced briefly at Dan. "I take a *partidario*," the don continued. "I make an agreement with

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him. I give him so many sheep; so many ewes, so many wethers, so many bucks. I get two pounds of wool a head when we shear, and twenty percent of the lambs. At the end of five years my *partidario* pays me back the sheep I gave him."

Dan nodded.

"They live and I live," Don Martin amplified. "I look after them. Is there anything wrong with that?"

Dan shook his head.

"Those were my sheep you helped with back there," O'Connor went on. "I'm lookin' for a *partidario* at that place. There's a good house and grass and water. It will handle ten thousand head of sheep." He eyed Dan narrowly.

"A good thing for someone," Dan agreed.

"A man might make some money," O'Connor continued.

"About what do the sheep shear?" Dan asked.

O'Connor pursed his lips. "Four or five pounds, maybe," he answered. "I've been using heavy-shearing bucks. We'll look at some bucks when we get back."

"You sell the wool in the East?"

"I do. I've been selling lambs in California, too, but they've sheep of their own out there now. The market's dropped."

"In Colorado—" Dan began.

"We'll talk tonight," O'Connor interrupted. "There's the house that I spoke of. It's a good house."

Dan looked at the square rock building. He saw the sheds and corrals behind it, saw the little stream that came trickling down from the hills to furnish water.

"A good place," he agreed.

Don Martin turned the buckboard and they headed back toward the southeast.

ALL the way back both men were silent. Martin O'Connor was engaged in thought and Dan respected his preoccupation. When they reached the hacienda the don turned the team over to a man at the barn and led the way to the big house.

In the patio the two men separated, each going to his room. Dan cleaned up, put on a fresh shirt taken from his grip, and wiped the dust from his boots. Returning to the patio, he found Marillita.

The two talked for a time, Marillita asking questions concerning Denver and the country to the north. The table was laid on the gallery. Martin O'Connor joined his daughter and guest and the three sat down.

When the meal was finished Don Martin brought out cigars, passed one to Dan Shea, and nodded to his daughter. "I'll talk some business with Mr. Shea," he said briefly. The girl made a small grimace of distaste but got up, smiled at Dan and went into the house. O'Connor leaned back in his chair and puffed smoke toward the porch roof.

"I'm sixty years old," he announced. "Forty years ago I came here without a cent in my pockets, as green a lad as ever sailed from Ireland."

Dan made no comment. None was necessary or expected.

"I came to Santa Fé with a wagon train," O'Connor continued. "From there I came on down here and here I stayed. I married Marillita's mother. In time she inherited El Puerto del Sol. I've built it since then. Built it with sheep."

Dan nodded. The night was growing all about and the lamp glowed yellow on the table.

"It's Marillita's when I'm gone," Martin O'Connor supplemented, looking narrowly at Dan Shea.

"A big place," Dan commented.

O'Connor took the cigar from his mouth and looked at it. "How did you happen to come West?" he asked suddenly.

Dan shrugged. "I was in the war," he answered. "When it was over I didn't go back. My people were dead and there was nothing to take me home. I came West and worked in the mines around Cripple Creek. Mining didn't suit. I worked for a buffalo hunter a while and then took out my own outfit. The buffalo are playing out. I bought wagons and horses and went to freighting. I got too big for my own good. The panic wiped me out. I paid my debts and started over."

"You know sheep," O'Connor reminded.

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"We raised them before the war," Dan explained.

O'Connor said, "Hmmm," and returned the cigar to his mouth. Smoke trailed up in the lamplight. "I've got to get a man for Rancho Norte," he commented.

Dan stared moodily at the lamp. He was thinking of the years behind him, recollection stirred in his mind by O'Connor's question. Martin O'Connor puffed the cigar to life, removed it from his lips and spoke again.

"I'll not let you have the sheep to drive to Colorado," he announced brusquely. "Maybe there's money to be made there; maybe not. If it's a good idea somebody else will try it. I'll wait an' see how they come out."

Dan was silent for a moment. Then: "I don't blame you," he said. "They're your sheep and I told you I had no money to buy them. But the first man to drive to that market will get the cream."

O'Connor's eyes were narrow as he watched his guest. "The cream from sheep comes in raisin' 'em," he said. "Well, good night."

"Good night."

"Take the lamp with you."

"Thanks."

Martin O'Connor hoisted himself to his feet and paused. "Tomorrow," he said, "I'll be goin' in to Bendicíon. I've a man in mind for Rancho Norte an' I want to get him. Likely you'll ride with me? The mail wagon doesn't go to town tomorrow."

"I'll be obliged for the ride," Dan Shea said.

"Good night then." O'Connor's voice was curt.

CHAPTER V

MOVE OVER, SHEEPMAN

THE following morning Dan Shea packed his grip. Again he and his host occupied the breakfast table without company. Again they went out to the barn and found the buckboard waiting. Marillita had not appeared.

Dan had searched the empty patio with his eyes and had seen no sign of the girl. He put his grip and rifle into the buckboard while Don Martin mounted to the seat. Dan stood beside a wheel. "I'd like to say goodbye and thank Miss O'Connor for her hospitality," he announced.

"She'll not be up yet," O'Connor answered briefly. "Get in, Shea. I'll give her your thanks."

Dan climbed into the buckboard.

Don Martin drove a team as though they were made of iron and not of flesh and blood. He kept the horses at a steady trot, covering country, putting the distance behind him. They lost sight of El Puerto del Sol after the first rise was crossed. They dropped down across the grassland and sighted the thin line of trees that marked Alamo Creek. As they reached the stream, Dan said: "Coming out I saw a man chasing a wolf with dogs. The mail driver said that his name was Perrier."

"I've paid him bounty on many a pelt," Don Martin said. "The Duke, they call him."

"That's a queer way to make a living."

"He does it for sport!" O'Connor's words were curt. He did not look at Dan Shea but continued to watch the horses and the road. It was evident that Martin O'Connor did not want to talk. Dan let the silence take them.

Reaching Bendicíon, they found the little town was busy as an ant hill. The hitch-rails around the plaza were crowded with saddle horses and teams. There were men on the sidewalks, men and women in the stores. On the grass of the plaza little knots of people were congregated, here a group of dark-skinned natives, here burly men from the mines.

Lanky riders leaned against the sides of buildings, saloon doors banged open and banged shut; from the stores came clerks and patrons carrying purchases to waiting wagons. Don Martin O'Connor stopped his buckboard before the hotel and Dan Shea climbed out.

"Thanks for the ride and for your hospitality," he said, lifting his belongings from the back of the buckboard. "You'll

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tell Miss O'Connor that I'm sorry I didn't get to say goodbye?"

"I'll do that." Don Martin was gruff. "You'll be welcome if you come to El Puerto del Sol again."

"I hope to," Dan answered. "Thanks again. Goodbye."

"*Adiós.*" The buckboard turned with a scrape of cramped wheels and Martin O'Connor sent his team along the side of the plaza. Dan, his grip dangling, entered the hotel and dropping the grip beside the desk asked for a room.

The clerk accepted the payment for the room and gave Dan a key. When Dan commented on Bendicíon's activity the clerk shrugged. This, he said, was Saturday and the first of the month. The mines had paid off and the miners were in town. There were many people, the clerk said, who came in from the surrounding territory to buy and to spend. Dan nodded, replaced the key on the desk and went out on the street again.

THERE was disappointment in Dan Shea. He had entertained high hopes of interesting Martin O'Connor in his idea. Those hopes were gone and he must start over.

As he walked down the street away from the hotel, Dan planned his next move. He turned the corner at the east end of the plaza and paused. There was a group of men across from him. Separated from this group, perhaps ten feet intervening, George Delaney stood talking with a heavy-bodied, bearded man. Anger rose in Dan at the sight of Delaney, and he turned his head away. But some inner urge prompted Dan to look back again and he saw that the young lawyer was watching him. The bearded man cast a hasty glance at Dan and then moved so that his back was toward the sidewalk.

Dan was startled. Somewhere, within the last few days, he had seen that bearded face. He was certain of it. Delaney talked to his companion, now and again lifting his eyes so that he looked at Dan Shea. Dan walked on, his anger somewhat dulled by his curiosity. He reached Fitzpatrick's saloon, went in and found Fitzpatrick behind the bar.

The two men shook hands. "What luck?" Fitzpatrick asked.

"No luck at all." Dan shook his head. "I talked with O'Connor. He won't let me have any sheep."

"I've been askin' some questions," Fitzpatrick volunteered. "Ramon de la Luz is sore because you jumped his friend Delaney. You can't get any of Ramon's sheep, but there's a place west of here that might be just the ticket."

"Whereabouts?" Dan asked.

"Over by Rio Salado. I'll find out a little more an' let you know."

Dan nodded. Fitzpatrick's friendship was good after his disappointment.

"Thanks, Fitz."

"Youtsey," Fitzpatrick said, changing the subject abruptly, "has been round again askin' about the murder. He wanted to know where you were, an' I told him. Youtsey don't like me much an' he figures you're a friend of mine. He—"

"Fitz!" Dan's interruption was sharp. "That's it!"

"What's it?" Fitzpatrick's voice showed his surprise.

"The man with Delaney!" Dan caught Fitzpatrick's arm and urged him toward the door. "He was one of those men at the stage station!"

"What?"

"On the corner." They were at the door now and Dan was looking out toward the corner. "He was standing there talking to Delaney. One of the men that killed Maples. I know it was."

"Where is he?" Fitzpatrick demanded.

Dan shook his head. "He's gone now. So is Delaney. They were standing there talking when I came in."

Fitzpatrick stepped out the door, Dan beside him. "See him any place?" Fitzpatrick asked.

"I don't see him now," Dan admitted. "But he was there, just a minute ago."

"Did he see you?" Fitzpatrick asked.

"Yes."

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The saloon keeper grunted. "He's pulled out then," he said.

"I'm going around the square," Dan announced. "Maybe I'll see him." Without waiting for Fitzpatrick's answer he swung away. Fitzpatrick remained in the doorway, examining the square.

DAN made the circuit of the plaza. He looked into the stores, entered the saloons, examined the men he met and passed. He did not see Delaney or the man who had been with him.

Dan was back at the corner close to Fitzpatrick's saloon before he paused. Fitzpatrick still stood in the doorway, looking toward him. Dan shook his head as a sign that the search had been fruitless. There was a little group crossing from the plaza toward the corner—three men. Dan stepped down into the street and started to cross.

In the center of the street he met the three from the plaza and shifted to give them passage. They were cowmen, booted, spurred, hats pushed back, faces flushed, more than a little drunk. As Dan moved, so too did the three, blocking his way. Dan recognized the men who had been in Fitzpatrick's saloon the night of his arrival at Bendicion. One of the three, the youngest, stopped, confronting Dan Shea.

"Git out of the way, sheepherder," the cowboy said harshly.

Anger, quick and hot, arose in Dan. He did not move.

"I said git out of the way," the puncher growled. "You lousy sheepherders think you own the street."

"Tell him, Buster," one of the group urged the youngster on. "Make the skunk move."

Around Dan's mouth the muscles tightened. His eyes were bleak. But he said nothing.

Buster, encouraged by Dan's silence and his companion's encouragement, reached out a hand and pushed against Dan's chest. Dan took a single step back.

"He don't want a fight," Buster's friend crowed. "Look at him back up. Lousy sheepherder. He—"

It was too much. Dan Shea's quiet broke into swift, devastating action. Buster he slapped with his open hand. Taken squarely on his cheek, Buster reeled from the blow, his hat flying.

Dan Shea quickly closed in. His fists were swift as striking snakes and as devastating as ax blows. Buster sat down in the street, his eyes vacant, one hand mechanically feeling his jaw. The other man went staggering back.

Fists were new to these riders. They were strong enough and they did not lack courage and willingness, but they were no match for Dan Shea. The third man, dodging a blow, stumbled into another and dropped across the sitting Buster's legs, to remain there.

The man who had backed before Dan's swift attack was reaching for his gun. Fitzpatrick, running from his doorway, had reached the scene. He stopped the reaching hand. "Hold it!" Fitzpatrick warned. His voice was sharp but that alone did not check the movement. The fact that Fitzpatrick himself held a weapon stopped the puncher.

Dan Shea, head lowered belligerently, blue eyes hot beneath his black brows, stood poised; and from the stores, from the street, from the plaza, men came to form a crowd, pushing in all about.

"That's the boy," Fitzpatrick praised as the third cowpuncher brought his hand away empty from his hip. "That's the boy!"

Youtsey, his face red and his breath short from running, pushed through the crowd and faced Dan Shea. "What's this?" the sheriff demanded. "What's goin' on here? Shea, you're disturbin' the peace. You're under arrest."

Anger still possessed Dan Shea. He looked at the sheriff and under the glare of his eyes Youtsey recoiled.

"You couldn't arrest one side of me," Dan told Youtsey. "Try it!"

"By glory . . ." Youtsey began.

"It was them that started it, Sheriff." Fitzpatrick spoke placatingly. "They were drunk. Nobody's hurt."

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THAT was true. Buster had regained his feet. His hat was in his hand, placed there by some bystander, and he stared at it foolishly. His companion had risen from the street and was staring at Buster, his eyes still bewildered. The man Fitzpatrick had discouraged was gone, merging with the crowd.

"Three of 'em," a voice said. "Did you see it start, Fred? He knocked two down just like that."

"It was them that started it, Sheriff," Fitzpatrick repeated earnestly.

Youtsey stood undecided, glaring at Dan. "You can't pull a thing like this in my town," he declared hotly. "Shea, I'll—"

"What's the trouble here?" a voice boomed. Men moved away. Through the lane that had opened for him, Don Martin O'Connor moved majestically. "What's the trouble?" he repeated as he stopped. "Mr. Shea's a friend of mine, Sheriff. I hope nothin's happened to him."

The belligerence faded from Youtsey's face as he looked at Martin O'Connor. His voice was obsequious. "Some drunks tried to jump Mr. Shea. I was just goin' to arrest 'em. You want to make a complaint, Mr. Shea?"

Dan shook his head. He was staring unbelievingly at Youtsey. Youtsey, flushing under the stare, turned back to the onlookers. "Go on now," he ordered sharply. "Nothin' to stand around here for. Go on now!"

Martin O'Connor slipped his hand familiarly under Dan's arm.

They went to Fitzpatrick's saloon. There, in the coolness of the barroom, away from all the crowd, they stopped. O'Connor, releasing Dan's arm, boomed his laughter.

"What started it?" he demanded, the laughter done but a chuckle still in his voice. "I didn't see the whole thing. I'm too old to run like a boy. What happened, Shea?"

"They were drunk," Dan said curtly. "I lost my temper."

Fitzpatrick's drawl was dryly humorous. "I'd say you mislaid it anyhow. They called him a lousy sheepman an' he didn't like it."

Don Martin's eyes narrowed. "Ain't you a sheepman?" he demanded.

"I'll take what they said from nobody!" Dan's temper was beginning to rise again. "I'm obliged to you, Don Martin. The sheriff was going to try to arrest me until you same along. I'm grateful. I—"

"Now wait a minute," Martin O'Connor interrupted, the twinkle growing in his eyes. "Ain't you a sheepman?"

"I haven't any sheep," Dan Shea said. "They started to curse me and I wouldn't stand for it. That's all. I'm obliged to you but—"

"An' whose fault is it that you've no sheep?" There was a note of asperity in O'Connor's voice. "Your wits aren't as quick as your fists, Shea. Here I am with nobody at Rancho Norte, an' you with no sheep. Now what do you think of that?"

"But you said you were coming to town to see a man," Dan reminded. "You said you had a man in mind for the place."

"An' I had," O'Connor agreed. "There was an Irish lad I had in mind. I hinted an' talked, an' the thickhead wouldn't say a word."

"You mean?" Light began to dawn on Dan Shea. "Would you take me for a *partidario* on Rancho Norte, Don Martin? Would you?"

Don Martin O'Connor's great hand descended between Dan Shea's shoulders, almost driving his breath away. "An' who else?" O'Connor boomed. "Who else did you think I had in mind? Of all the dumb ones! An' Irish too!"

"Then . . ." Dan Shea began, and caught his breath. "Then you'll . . ."

"From now on, Mr. Shea," Don Martin O'Connor interrupted gravely, "they'll be speakin' the truth when they call you a sheepman. You can still resint the lousy." His great hand shoved against Dan Shea's back and his laughter boomed. "We'll take a drink on it," he said at length. "You an' your friend. Come on now." Again his great laugh rang out.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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MEN of DARING
by STOMMIE ALLEN
CAT MASTER!
THIS 57-YEAR-OLD FRENCHMAN, ONE OF THE GREATEST WILD-ANIMAL TRAINERS IN THE WORLD, WAS NEVER INSIDE OF A CAGE UNTIL HE WAS 35. AN ACROBAT, THEN A CIRCUS OWNER HIMSELF, HE TOOK OVER A 4-LION ACT WHEN ITS TRAINER WAS KILLED, AND HAS BEEN AT IT EVER SINCE.
IN NICE, WHILE HE WAS SEPARATING 2 FIGHTING LIONS, A TIGRESS THAT HAD ALREADY SLAIN 2 TRAINERS, JUMPED COURT FROM BEHIND. HE RECEIVED SOME 20 WOUNDS!
ALFRED COURT
NOW HE USES 3 CAGES, AND COMBINATIONS OF LIONS, TIGERS, BEARS, LEOPARDS, PANTHERS -- AND A PAIR OF GREAT DANES! HE NEVER HAS TAKEN A GUN INTO A CAGE AND WORKS ONLY WITH A WHIP AND LIGHT STICK!
BEFORE THE CIRCUS OPENED IN NEW YORK LAST APRIL, INDO, UNDERSTUDY FOR HIS STAR PERFORMER, A VALUABLE SNOW LEOPARD, CLAWED COURT'S FACE AND KILLED THE SNOW LEOPARD. BUT ON OPENING NIGHT COURT AND INDO WENT THROUGH THE ACT IN WHICH HE WRAPS INDO AROUND HIS NECK LIKE A FUR PIECE --- AS THOUGH NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.

A True Story in Pictures

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North of the Law

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Sons of the Tall Timber," "Christmas on Ice," etc.

Introducing Mrs. McGee's little boy, No-Shirt, in a brief appearance as deputy marshal—complete with guns, fists, and a couple of murders. This act is highly recommended as a rest cure

CHAPTER I

TIME OUT FOR TROUBLE

ME AND Bulldozer are settin' in our hotel room listenin' to the radio and all at once I turn it off. "What's eatin' on you, No-Shirt?" he growls. "That's our favorite program."

"It gets on my nerves," I tell him.

"Try readin' a book," he advises, "or a magazine. Have you looked at the evenin' paper yet?"

"Tried 'em all," I tell him, "but can't get interested."

He looks at me a long time. "If you was a young squirt," he says, "I'd say you was in love. Hey, you ain't been chasin' any widder wimmin have you?"

"Couldn't run fast enough to catch 'em if I did," I tell him. "But don't worry about me; I'm okay. Just off'n my feed."

He don't say anything more, which is bad itself. It proves he's thinkin' about the problem. The next mornin' around eleven o'clock he pops into the room. "Get dressed," he says, "we've got some pardnership business to look after."

When I try to pin him down he hurries off and says it's too long to explain. A half hour later I meet him and we walk down the street a ways and enter a buildin'. We get off on the seventh floor and the first thing I know I'm in a doctor's office. "What the hell?" I ask.

"Havin' you in shape is pardnership business," he says. "I could talk until hell froze over about you seein' a doctor and you wouldn't have listened, so I figgered to lure you up here, and if you try to leave I'll slap you down."

I have to grin as he borrows a phrase from one of my favorite radio characters. "Okay," I tell him, "I'll go through with it."

"You should've gone into drydock long ago," he says, "for a general overhaulin'."

"Yeah," I growl, "I suppose my ribs need new planks, my bottom should be painted, and maybe my whistle needs overhaulin'."

I know the doctor. He used to practice in Alaska and we spent many a night on the trail together. "Well! Well! No-Shirt," he says, "this is the happiest day of my life. Funds are low, you're in the money, I haven't the price of a bottle of whisky and for years I've longed to get a knife into you."

"Tryin' to stick me for the drinks, as usual," I tell him. Then he puts on his professional face and the first thing I know he's goin' over me from head to heels.

BULLDOZER is standin' there watchin'. He still figgers I may grab my clothes and leg it through the side door. "Can't you find anything wrong with the old coot, doc?" he asks.

"Not yet."

"Keep huntin' then," Bulldozer urges. "He don't listen to the radio, read, nor even turn and look at a ankle like he used to. Awhile back these short skirts would've drove him crazy."

"Shut up," I tell him.

After that the doc asks a lot of fool questions, which don't seem to add up, but somehow he gets a total. "No-Shirt," he says, "you've been under quite a strain lately. You had to go fooling around in

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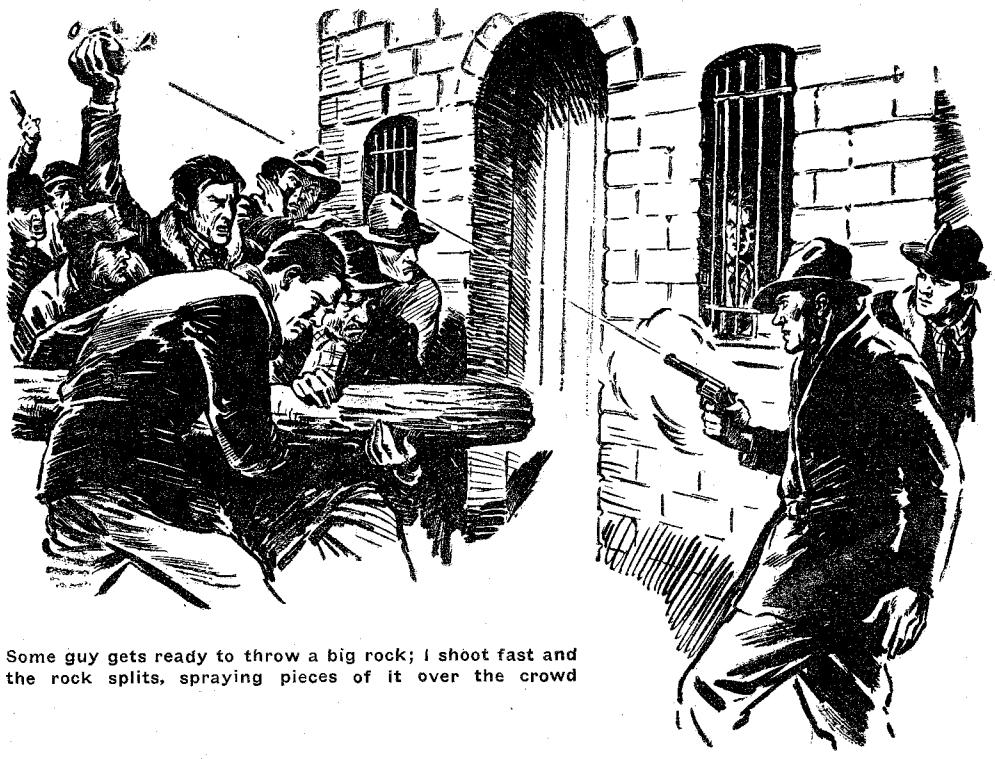

Some guy gets ready to throw a big rock; I shoot fast and the rock splits, spraying pieces of it over the crowd

the war zone in an old schooner. The shooting and bombing and all that naturally affected your nerves. You were keyed up at the time and still are."

"I had a lot of fun; and as usual you're wrong, doc; I haven't any nerves," I tell him. "I'm just off'n my feed."

"I don't see why you had to fool around in the war zone—a man of your years," he complains. "What did it get you?"

"It added to my store of knowledge," I tell him. "The more a man learns the better chance he has of winning out if he's in a tight place. Doc, experience is a wonderful thing."

He snorts. "I suppose what you learned in the war zone will help you as an Alaskan prospector?"

"You never can tell," I answer.

"Enough of this chatter," he says. "You are to stop all mining, logging, drinking, smoking—"

"What're you tryin' to do?" I interrupt, "make me commit suicide? No minin', loggin', drinkin' or smokin'. A man's better off dead."

He looks at me coldly. "I want you to go north and visit around. Look up your old friends, talk about old times and adopt a don't-care attitude toward life for six months. If you'll do this I promise you you'll be your old time self. You'll turn your head when a pretty girl passes by."

"You can lead a horse to water, Doc," I tell him, "but you can't make him drink."

"No?" Bulldozer sneers. "You're one horse I'm goin' to lead to water, and you're goin' to drink if I have to hold your head under until you drown."

EXACTLY seven days later I'm settin' in front of the pioneer home at Sitka lookin' at old Russian cannon, listenin' to the bells of the Russian mission and talkin' to retired stampeders and pioneers. A hundred yards away Bulldozer is tryin' to talk Chinook to a young squaw who can speak better English than he can. Overhead the

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bombers from the navy air station are roarin'.

I stay at Sitka a week, then move on to Junea. Four weeks from the day Bulldozer hauls me into doc's office I'm at Shipwreck Harbor which is in the Arctic ocean.

We flew from Fairbanks to Nome and went the rest of the way on a tradin' schooner. Shipwreck Harbor is quite a place and was so named because the pack ice smashed several whalers there and left the Eskimos more wood and iron than they could use in a lifetime.

As soon as we land on the beach I yell at the first white man I see. "Where's Cam McKay?" He's the deputy United States marshal for the region. And in area it's bigger'n New England.

The white man turns out to be the school teacher. "Cam left five weeks ago," he says. "There's trouble of some kind in the Stormy Inlet country. A young fellow named Bill Mason went up there looking for gold—"

"There's no gold in that country," I tell him.

"That's where you're wrong," the school teacher answers, "along with plenty of others. Bill studied formations. He was sure a creek had once emptied into the inlet; that pressure of the ice pack when the storms were bad had pushed sand from the ocean floor and filled the creek bed to a depth of several feet; that the ice, forming a dam, had caused the creek to find a new channel, which naturally contained no gold."

The country's low and flat except for headlands at the inlet, and I can see how that's possible, as I wintered there once on a fur buyin' trip. Not only that, but when the break-up came I prospected the creek and found nothin', never dreamin' there could be an ancient channel. "Go on," I tell the teacher.

"It turns out Bill Mason is right," he says. "He started in where the old creek should've been according to his calculations and came within a hundred feet of it. Clam shells and walrus tusks proved the ice had dumped ocean floor material there. Then he struck gold."

"By golly, that's interestin'," I tell him. I can see Bulldozer's eyes are shinin', too. We're always pullin' for the cuss who has a idea nobody else has thought of. And especially we like to see him win when everybody's laughed at him.

"There are always buzzards waiting to pick the bones of some fellow with courage," the teacher continues, "and this was no exception. Bill Mason was having trouble with claim jumpers and he sent two Eskimo boys in a skin boat to Cam McKay. We saw the umiak off the harbor mouth and investigated. One native was dead and the other badly wounded. He told Cam what had happened. He's in the mission hospital now, recovering. And Cam has gone to arrest the guilty men if he can find them. Failing in that, he plans to supply the necessary protection."

"Cam's a old friend of mine," I tell the teacher. "It looks as if I'd have to go to Stormy Inlet to do my visitin'. What's the best way to get there?"

"The *Myrtle S* is the only vessel making even the slightest attempt to maintain a regular freight and passenger service in this part of the Arctic," the teacher explains. "She left three weeks ago. It'll be another three weeks before she's back."

"Then she'll be heading for Nome," I reflect. I know the *Myrtle S*. She's a small, steel steamer built to buck the ice and she's slow. Her speed is known and she is usually on time. "Three weeks is too long, and a Nome-bound steamer won't do us any good. We'll get a umiak and—"

"Oh no you don't," Bulldozer says. "There's excitement at Stormy Inlet—a brawl over mining claims. That means men, murder and mystery. Remember doctor's orders: no excitement. You're stayin' right here."

"And you'll go?" I ask, plenty hot under the collar.

"I'd sure like to see what's goin' on," Bulldozer admits, "but there'd be nobody to watch you. And you'd be mixin' into somethin' as soon as my back was turned."

"And why not?" I say. "I've had a month of this and I still don't turn my

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head at the swish of a skirt. I ain't gettin' any better, so . . ."

"Rome wasn't built in a day," he says. "And the doc didn't expect a cure in a few weeks. You're stayin' right here."

CHAPTER II

YOUR TRICK, MCGEE

ME AND Bulldozer move into Cam's house and in a couple of days I see Bulldozer hangin' 'round a Eskimo queen. He's learnin' the Eskimo dialect, now.

"I may as well learn things about the country and people as long as I'm actin' as a he-nurse to you," he says. "And don't think I ain't watchin' you. I know you're figgerin' to give me the slip and get to Stormy Inlet, but it can't be done, brother. It can't be done."

It turns out he's right. Every time I try to bribe a native to take me to the inlet in his umiak it turns out he's a friend of Bulldozer's and won't do it. Speakin' the same language, I suppose, and I ain't punnin' either.

Ten days of this monotony is suddenly busted wide open by the arrival of a plane. It's a wheel job and it lands on the beach and a minute later the door pops open. Out steps a bundle of sweetness that leaves everybody goggle-eyed.

She's about five feet four and weighs exactly what a five-foot-four girl should weigh who has the right kind of curves in the right places. She's blond, blue-eyed, and the eyes look as if they'd shed a few tears in private. I've got a hunch if she hangs around long Bulldozer will start learnin' the English language—which same would be no mean feat.

"Is this Stormy Inlet?" she asks the pilot; then before he can answer she says, "It isn't. It's some other place. I see no creek nor mining operation."

"This is Shipwreck Harbor," the pilot says. "I told you we bucked head winds and are out of fuel. I couldn't chance it."

"I'd have chanced it," she storms. "What kind of a man are you? What— Oh, I'm sorry. But you see he's in danger—"

"Who's in danger?" Bulldozer demands. "If you need a hand, count on me."

"My fiancé," she says, "Bill Mason. I heard him talking on his short wave radio to a friend in Seattle. I have a receiving set, tuned in on his wave length. You see I simply had to know what was going on."

"That's the spirit," Bulldozer agrees.

"Some person named Les Brody insists he owns part of the ground Bill is working. Bill sent for the marshal, an old fellow. The man came and there was shooting and the marshal was killed or badly wounded, Bill wasn't sure which," she explains.

"This Les Brody organized a miner's meeting, or something, and had himself elected deputy marshal to preserve law and order. You can see it is a mess, and I'm worried sick over Bill, so I chartered a plane and flew to Fairbanks. Then I chartered another one, hoping to land in Stormy Inlet and—well, now I'm here."

"By golly, something is goin' to be done about it," I tell her. "I know Les Brody. He's one of the smooth kind. Lets others steal the cake then hogs down the biggest cut. You'd think he was the salt of the earth if you met him. He can charm a bird off'n a bush."

"He isn't going to charm me," she flares. "I'll fight him to the last ditch. The idea of him expecting to have any portion of the gold after Bill figuring out just where it was. The very idea." Her eyes blaze and me and Bulldozer moans, "Amen, sister!" at the same time. It sounds like a revival meetin'.

ABOUT this time, the pilot who is one of these quiet, capable boys says, "There is an umiak about fifteen miles from Shipwreck Harbor. I flew low, but couldn't make out the situation. It seemed to me a man was lying on the bottom and four natives were paddling. The umiak was fitted with an outboard motor, but they weren't using it."

"Coming from Stormy Inlet, would you say?" I ask.

"That's right," he answers.

Me and Bulldozer leg it down to the

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beach and look over available craft. Some of the umiaks are ready to put to sea, but none of them have the well built in through which to lower a outboard motor.

"What do we do now?" Bulldozer asks.

"Chase around town," I tell him, "and get two outboards of the same horsepower. I've faced this problem before."

While he's gone I locate a heavy timber and lash it across the umiak a third of the way from the stern. By the time that's done Bulldozer is back with two outboards. We hang 'em on the timber and get 'em both turnin' over. Bulldozer is engineer and I steer with a paddle.

With both motors wide open we make the fifteen miles in less than a hour. "There's the umiak off to the left," Bulldozer says. "Say, No-Shirt, you shouldn't be doin' this. Doctor's orders."

"I'm here," I snap. "Shut off both motors and we'll come alongside."

The other umiak is waitin' for us. We come alongside and I go aboard. Old Cam is the man in the bottom of the umiak, sure enough. He's plenty wounded. "It's No-Shirt, Cam," I say.

He opens his eyes slowly and looks stupid. "Oh, it's you," he says. Then suddenly he realizes I ain't supposed to be so far north. "What're you doin' here?"

"Came up for my health," I tell him. "Now—what happened?"

"Tried to stop a riot," he answers, "and somebody shot me three times. That was six days ago. Was out a couple of days and the boys kept me hid."

He nods toward two serious-looking Eskimos who seemed to have authority over the others. "I told 'em to take me home. Bearin' burned out in the motor. Then they had to paddle again' headwinds."

"Let me have a look at those wounds," I tell him.

"Shift me to your umiak, No-Shirt," he says, "and go like hell. An hour or two more won't make no difference."

We get him to the hospital then I send Bulldozer back to pick up the exhausted Eskimos. They've been paddlin' day and night.

The doctor's a young one, but he knows his business. He cleans out the wounds and orders complete quiet. "I'll be quiet," Cam says, "but I've got a little business to 'tend to first. I ain't forgettin' I'm a peace officer."

"I can't be responsible—" the doctor begins, but Cam shuts him off. Then he turns to me.

"No-Shirt, you've been both deputy marshal and deputy sheriff in your checkered life in the north and west. Put up your hand and be sworn in as special deputy," he says.

He has the authority and I put up my hand and make the usual promises. "Now," he says, "light out for Stormy Inlet and bring about law and order." He has to rest a minute before he can finish. "Remember, while you can't prove it perhaps, Les Brody is behind everything that's goin' on."

"I'll never forget it," I promised; then I fixed up a commission for him to sign. When a man goes up against Les Brody he has to produce his authority.

Cam is still awake when I bring the commission to the hospital. He's restless and is runnin' a fever. The doctor don't like it, but he lets Cam sign my commission and the last words I hear as I leave the room is him wishin' me luck and claimin' I'm goin' to need it.

OUTSIDE I meet the plane pilot and ask him who the girl is. "Her name is Mary Kane," he says. "I call her Hurricane for short." He's kinda grim about it, but there's a smile of admiration around his lips as he looks at her.

"She's got some dough and backed Bill Mason. She's so in love with the cuss you like him, without seeing him. I'd have taken her through if I could."

"You've got to take me through," I tell him.

"I haven't the gasoline, and I couldn't land at the inlet anyway. She's blowing a gale," he says.

"There's gas here," I argue.

"Not plane gas," he answers.

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"Now listen," I tell him, "in an emergency where the peace of a community is threatened, an officer can confiscate whatever he needs. And he can swear in whoever he thinks is necessary to restore order. I'll gamble on the local gasoline if you will. When we get over the inlet, you size up the situation. If you can land, okay. If you can't I'll parachute to the ground."

"You fool!" he yells. "Don't you realize parachute jumping is—"

"Is easy as fallin' off a log," I interrupt. "You open the door, fall out backwards, wait a few seconds, then pull the little ring. I know, because I done it once."

"That settles it, then," he says.

We round up the best of the local gasoline, strain it and fill the tanks. In the middle of it, Hurricane comes stormin' up. "You can't go without me," she says. "Bill may be hurt; he may need me." Then she starts climbin' into the plane.

She's a bundle of loveliness until I start draggin' her from the plane, then she seems to be full of claws. "Now listen," I argue. "I'm goin' to restore order. I may have to jump from the plane."

"I'll restore order for them," she snaps back. "And I'll jump from the plane, too."

"No you won't," I tell her. Then I get a couple of sourdoughs to hold her.

You'd think I'd had enough trouble with her, without more pilin' on. Before we can get away the umiak lands and Bulldozer comes runnin' up. I can't hear what he's sayin' because the motor makes too much noise; but I can tell from his lips he's yellin', "You can't do that, it's against doctor's orders. You'll kill yourself, you old goat."

As soon as we get into the air I write a note, which I give to the pilot to drop. It reads:

Bulldozer:
Load grub, gasoline and ammunition into the twin-motored umiak and meet me at Stormy Inlet.

No-Shirt,
Deputy U. S. Marshal.

We roar over and the message is dropped. I see Bulldozer read it, then he shakes his fist at me, but I know he'll back my hand.

AS WE head for Stormy Inlet clouds press in around the plane and pretty soon the pilot climbs above them. When we're in bright sunshine he says, "I feel kind of sorry for old Cam McKay. This mess will mean the end of his job. You see he's getting old and several tinhorn politicians would like his job. He's in wrong with Les Brody and his gang because he wouldn't let them get away with several pretty raw deals."

"Brody draws plenty of water sometimes," I tell him. "And he can make a green man in office believe Brody and his friends elected him."

"He's sittin' pretty these days," the pilot says. "The mess at the Inlet, which you can be sure he engineered, is all that's needed to convince the powers that be that Cam is too old for the job. He'll be eased out, a Brody man eased in and then it'll be tough for a lot of honest traders, prospectors and trappers. Such is politics."

I spend the rest of the trip mutterin' in my beard and wonderin' how to handle the deal if and when I reach the Inlet all in one piece. In the end I conclude to let the situation show me what I'd better do.

We drop down through thick weather and just when I figger we're so low he'll have to climb again I catch a glimpse of the Arctic. It's streaked with white. "Plenty of wind down there," the pilot says. To the north there's a big, black cloud rollin' over the water. He tries to go around it, but not a chance.

The glimpse the pilot caught of water and a headland was all he needed. He changes the course, flies ten minutes, then starts down again. This time he has to climb. He circles and says, "The camp is below us."

"Can't land, eh?" I feel a tightness in my manly bosom, and I'm wonderin' if the chute was packed right and will open.

"Can't land," he says, "and you're a fool if you jump."

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"I'd jump several times if it'd help Cam McKay," I answer. I check on the straps and am ready. "Say when."

He nods and I go back and get the door open. It's a tough job again' the windstream. I push my stern through, hang on and watch the pilot. He nods. I set my teeth, pinch my eyes shut tight and fall backwards. I danged near yank the ring off as I jerk it.

A million years later the chute opens. So do my eyes.

I can't see a thing but fog pressin' in on all sides. I watch for the ground and suddenly there it is. I hit, relaxed, and go knee-deep in muck. The chute yanks me out, nearly pullin' me in half, then drags me along through tules and swamp muck. I cut loose and feel myself. I'm all in one piece. Then I listen. The wind is moanin' over the tundra and swamp in a way that makes a man feel the night will be a good one for a murder.

I work to hard ground, walk a half mile and come to a trail. Now I know where I am: a mile from the camp at Stormy Inlet.

I start to walk, then go into a run as I hear a sound a man never forgets once he's heard it; a mob demandin' blood. As I run I unlimber my forty-four and make sure there's no mud in the barrel. Also I pin on my badge, then button my coat so it won't show.

A short distance from the town I pass several Eskimo igloos of driftwood and sod, then the wooden buildin's Bill Mason put up for his men. Out of the corner of my eye I can see tailin' dumps.

Ahead there's a two-story buildin' made of heavy timbers which has been turned into a jail. Men are crowded around hollerin' and yellin'. A couple of 'em have ropes with hangman's knots.

It's almost dusk, but I can recognize Les Brody standin' with his back to the jail door. He's coverin' the crowd with a brace of automatic pistols and he's yellin', "Stand back, boys. I don't want to kill any of you, but I will if you don't get back."

I KNOW it don't mean a thing except that it'll make him look good if there's a investigation later on. He's buildin' his bridges right now.

I push through until I'm shoulder to shoulder with a Brody man. "Maybe we'd better clear out," I suggest, "before the shootin' starts."

The man is ginned up and talkative. "They got Bill Mason in jail for safe keepin'. He's supposed to have shot an old miner. He didn't do it, but it was all Les needed to throw him in the coop. Then Les Brody's right bower works up mob violence. Les will make a play at defendin' him. He'll shoot over our heads, then let hisself be overpowered and some of the boys will take Mason out and hang him." He grins. "Stick around and watch the fun. Good old Les is a artist."

Then he seems to get the idear I'm a stranger and he's been talkin' too much. "You bet good old Les is a artist at this business," I tell him. "I've seen him work before."

Somebody gets a timber for a batterin' ram and they smack the door with it. While they're backin' off for another blow I push through the space left by the ram. I keep my head down and don't look up until I'm at Les Brody's side; then I whirl and we're shoulder to shoulder.

"I'm takin' charge, Brody," I tell him.

"The hell you are," he snarls. "Bill Mason pulled some high-handed stuff here. Trouble started and Cam McKay was shot up. Some of us tried to restore order. We held a miners' meeting and I was elected deputy marshal until a regular marshal qualified."

"I qualified," I tell him. "And have the papers to prove it. If you think I'm bluffin', why just call me. And if you think I don't know your game you've another think comin', Brody. I know your history and you know I do."

While we're talkin' we're wavin' four guns at the crowd. Many of the stampeders who come into the country when Mason struck it are in the crowd. They ain't vicious, only watchin' the excitement. The

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Brody men are waitin' for a signal from their leader. He ain't givin' signals—yet.

"How'd you get here, McGee?" he says suddenly. "Cam couldn't have made it to Shipwreck Harbor and sworn you in, and you couldn't have made it here so soon."

"So you knew the umiak motor would burn out eh, and delay him?" I say, hoppin' onto the slip. "A pilot spotted the umiak and I made a parachute jump less than a hour ago. Never mind the details in between."

I lift my voice. "Here's my authority, boys." I throw back my coat and let 'em see the badge. "And I ain't goin' through the motions of defendin' this prisoner. I'm carryin' out my duty as provided by law. And that includes shootin' if you keep comin'." This is for the Brody outfit's benefit.

"Aw go and buy yourself a shirt, McGee," a big cuss sneers. He's got a big rock in his hand and he draws it back to let fly. I shift my old forty-four and blaze away. The bullet shatters the rock and drones, too low for comfort, over the crowd. Flyin' bits of rock cut the man's hand and sting the faces of those near him.

I can see the Brody men don't like the game. Those in front commence to work back where they won't be recognized. This is the signal for those left in front to back up, also. It's the only trick of breakin' up a mob. I keep my eyes and guns movin' slowly back and forth and each man figgers he'll be the next target.

"Light out," I yell, "and don't come back."

"Your trick, McGee," Brody sneers. "But don't think you're going to take the pot."

CHAPTER III

HURRICANE'S GOLD

LES BRODY is a two-hundred-pounder who stands six feet two inches. He's handsome in a rugged kind of way and looks like a man folks want to tie to. He discovered the effect he had on people when he was a kid and he'd been cashin' in on it ever since. He was a good dancer, and in a fight had the speed of a lightweight.

But he was physically yellow. The man who got in a good punch had the fight well in hand. He couldn't take it.

Knowin' that, I didn't have any trouble in takin' the play away from him. His role was to stay in the background, play the game, and let his pawns take the punishment and jail terms. I figgered the easy way he backed down was only the beginnin'. He was after Mason's gold and seein' he couldn't get it this way, he would work out another.

As soon as the crowd scatters I ask Brody for the keys. "Here they are, McGee," he says. "And I'm sorry I got tough with you. I felt as if you were grabbing the glory after I had done the dirty work." And that crack didn't fool me, either.

The first thing I do is to look at Bill Mason. He's a clean-cut, broad-shouldered young fellow with a fine-looking head. I've seen lads like him come into a country before. Usually they stayed to develop it. They're different from the type that strips a country then lights out for greener fields. They take root.

"I'm the new marshal, Mason," I tell him, holdin' out my hand. "The trouble's over. You're safe. Your gold is safe, so you can go ahead minin'."

He don't say a word, just sets there and gazes at me. I take him by the arm and lead him to a window where there's more light. His eyes are dead. He's a man in a trance. My foot steps on somethin' and I look down. It's a bullet. I pick it up and it's got fragments of hair and flesh in the lead, along with bits of wood.

There's a hole in the other window where the bullet entered, and a dented spot on the opposite wall where it hit. I look at Mason's head. There's a wound on it and blood is slowly tricklin' down the back of his neck.

Now that he's turned around I can see his wool outer and under shirts are soaked with blood. Somebody shot him while he was in the cell—prob'ly pacin' back and forth, or may be standin' still listenin' to the roar of the mob.

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While I'm examinin' the wound somebody yells, "Let me in!"

I go to the front door, ready for more trouble. A thin-faced cuss with shifty eyes and clothes soiled by mine muck is standin' there. "I'm Luke Dexter," he says, "Bill Mason's night foreman. I come here for orders and—"

He looks beyond me and sees Mason slumped in a chair. "What happened?"

"Some rat shot him," I answer.

"Dead?" he asks.

"Not yet. I think he'll be okay in a few days. Just a crease," I tell him, "but sometimes such wounds turn bad."

"I'll watch him," he says, "and you get the camp doctor."

"Where was he durin' the riot?" I ask. "Why ain't he on the job?"

"He went off huntin' ducks," he answers. "Just got back. He didn't know anything about this. You'll find him at the end of the street."

I start to go, then change my mind. "May be you'd better find him," I suggest.

He leaves on the run and pretty soon he comes back with a tired-looking young man who sports a crushed mosquito moustache. As soon as he takes over Mason I know this doc understands his business. "This is serious," he says. "We better notify Stanton."

"Who's Stanton?" I ask.

"He's Bill Mason's superintendent," he answers. "You see Mason had a theory about formations and the pressure of pack ice. This led to his belief he would find gold here. He found it, but he lacked practical mining experience and he employed Stanton, and later Dexter.

"Stanton was with me on the duck-hunting trip. He's pretty well exhausted. We got lost and had to work our way through a knee-deep area of swamp muck. He's a heavy man and kept breaking through. Luke, will you get Stanton, please?"

Dexter lights out once more.

THE fact Les Brody is on the job is all the proof I need the trouble was staged. But how well it was staged is proved by the fact both the doctor and Stanton were away. And they're men who'd naturally be with Mason when trouble came.

Stanton came on the run. I liked him. He had minin' foreman written all over him. "I didn't even know there had been a riot until Dexter told me," he said. "I wouldn't have left if I had expected trouble. We had had some unrest among the boys and several of the newer men were nasty, but I thought I had smoothed things over."

"The newer men were probably planted in the force by Les Brody to make trouble," I tell him.

He nods and turns to Dexter. "Where were you when the boss was arrested?"

"I never believed he shot the old miner, even though the man did have it comin' to him," Dexter answers. "I figgered he'd be in jail a day or so and you'd fix things when you come back. Then all at once the mob forms. Brody is standin' 'em off. My first idear is to join Brody, then I figger a Mason man up there might make things worse. I hunt cover, the idear bein' a loose man in good health can do more than a dead or wounded hero." He laughs.

"That's right," Stanton agrees. We rig up a stretcher and carry Bill Mason to the little hospital.

"We'll leave this to you, doc," I tell him. "Stanton, I want to talk things over with you at the jail."

His eyes narrow. "Am I under suspicion?" he asks.

"Don't see why you should be," I answer.

"May be you had better suspect all men, me included," he says. "A lot of things that have puzzled me are beginnin' to make a picture since the riot and the shootin' of Bill Mason."

"What's the condition of the mine?" I ask.

"When the trouble started," he answers, "we wanted to make certain they couldn't get away with the gold. We pretended to cache it above ground. Actually it was hidden in a cross cut. We blew out the cribbin' later and the shaft filled in."

"How much will it total?"

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"A ton! A ton of gold!" he says, and I get that cold-chill feelin' up and down the ribs.

"It was all concentrated in a small area as Mason figgered it would be," he explains.

"And men in the mine knew it," I suggest. "The word was passed along, Les Brody heard it and moved in with the other stampeders and the trouble started."

"I've heard about Brody," Stanton admits, "and I was watchin' him, here. But he didn't do a single suspicious thing. Well, what's the next move?"

"Open up the mine," I tell him, "and put a guard over the gold. I've a man in mind who'll make a good guard. A cuss named Bulldozer Craig."

"I've heard of him," Stanton says. "It'll take several days to open up the shaft. The sand sifts in."

I nodded. I've cussed and busted my heart and back over loose sand myself. "Have you a surveyor's transit I can borrow?"

"Yes. Bill Mason brought one in with him," he answers.

BILL ain't no better the next day and there's still plenty of excitement with Les Brody goin' around and makin' a fine show of calmin' down men I know are part of his gang. I get busy on the short wave radio and reach a plane flyin' north from Fairbanks. "Go to Shipwreck Harbor," I tell the pilot, "and drop a message to Mary Kane. Tell her to come to Stormy Inlet."

I got a hunch she'll do it any way, but I want to be sure. This out of the way, I set up the transit in the jail cell where Bill Mason was shot. Then I run a string from the bullet hole in the window to the place in the wall where the bullet made a dent. I place the transit beside the string and at the same angle, then I take a look-see.

There's a tundra-covered ridge above the town and I'm lookin' at a spot where there's a kind of notch. Whoever fired that bullet, I muse, was squattin' in that notch, or close by. I return the transit without anybody knowin' what I'd used it for.

That evenin' when the camp is quiet I take a walk to the notch. The tundra is tramped down, but I can't identify any footprints because the growth is too thick to leave a mark. There's one spot that catches my eye. Somebody has been down on his knees a long time while watchin' the jail window.

He's left mine muck on the vegetation—stuff that's rubbed off from his overalls. I get down on my own knees and study the ground. The man's knees has worked through the grass to muck and he's left a faint imprint of his overalls.

I can see what looks like a patch that's been sewed on with coarse stitches. Except for that, the cuss was pretty smooth. He didn't leave any cigaret butts nor empty shells to be used as exhibit A against him in case the finger of suspicion pointed his way.

I get back to camp and wander around with downcast eyes. I'm lookin' for a buzzard wearin' a patch on the right knee of his overalls. And I find him. But I don't make no arrests, nor am I surprised. He's just the kind of a hairpin who'd try and shoot a man in jail, if it looked like the prisoner wouldn't be lynched.

AT NOON the followin' day the wind dies down and the air is clear of flyin' clouds. As soon as the mists lift down on the inlet I can see Bulldozer and the twin-motored umiak approachin' at top speed.

He jumps ashore, lifts Mary Kane like she was a cork and sets her down on the sand. "Bulldozer offered to bring me," she said, "and there was no telling when I could get a plane." She looks around as if she expects to see Bill Mason, then asks, "How is he?" Her voice is tight.

I break the news and take her to the hospital. For a minute I think she's goin' to faint. Her face turns the color of wet ashes and she leans against the wall. "He's—lost his reason," she whispers. "Oh . . ." Then she does break.

I let her cry on my shoulder and the doc keeps sayin', "I'm sure this is a temporary condition, Miss Kane."

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I've a hunch the kind thing to do is to give her somethin' to occupy her mind and I take her down to the jail office, which ain't much more'n a desk and three, four chairs. "I radioed a pilot to get in touch with you," I tell her. "And here's why. There's a ton of gold below ground. Somebody has to take charge. Bill can't. Now do I understand you're his legal pardner?"

"Yes. I backed his idea and we agreed to split fifty-fifty after all expenses had been paid," she says. "But I don't care about gold or anything. The thing to do is to fly Bill—"

"The thing to do is to let him be quiet," I tell her. "He can't be flown out of here yet. It's up to you to look after his interests. He'll appreciate it plenty when he's up and around. He's worked hard, used his head and taken plenty of chances to develop this mine."

"Of course you're right," she says. "What had I better do?"

"Tell Superintendent Stanton you're taking charge. When the gold is brought up give Bulldozer the job of guardin' it."

There's a knock and when I yell, "Come in," Les Brody opens the door. "I'm Les Brody," he says to Hurricane. "I'm sorry Mason was hurt. He's a fine man. I did what I could to save him from the mob."

"And I appreciate it," the girl says.

"I find myself in a very unpleasant situation," Brody says. "I have a claim against the gold. A portion of it was taken from the adjoining claim which I own."

"Oh, I didn't know that," she says, looking worried.

"Yes. Naturally I have to protect my interests, and, really I can't let you take any part of the gold away from the Inlet," he goes on to say, "until the matter is settled."

"But," she protests, "it must go out on the next boat, the *Myrtle S*, I believe it is."

"Not unless we come to some understanding," he says. And he's so blasted polite, and acts as if it hurt him all over, I get madder every minute. Hurricane is smart, but she don't see through Brody's game.

"This gold has caused a riot, an old miner has been killed, a deputy marshal badly wounded," I say, "and on top of that Bill Mason is hurt. I'm goin' to impound the gold and keep possession until matters are settled by the law." I'm feelin' pretty good over this stand until I catch a glint in Brody's eyes, then I know I've done what he hoped I'd do.

"That will be satisfactory," Hurricane says. "I know of no safer place for gold than in a United States marshal's possession. You'll see that it goes to Nome, or some place, before the freeze-up?"

"Sure," I agree.

"I suggest," Les Brody says, "you give us a receipt for it, McGee. Just to have everything in order."

"Sure," I say again. "When the gold is turned over to me."

CHAPTER IV

MIND ON THE LOOSE

I SURE felt better when Bulldozer showed up. That is for a few minutes. "I got Cam McKay to swear me in, too," he says. "Now you can get shed of all this grief and excitement. Remember what the doctor said about excitement? You must've got a bad setback by this time."

"Don't try and run a whizzer on me," I tell him. "Get rested from the umiak trip. You've got bags under your eyes big enough to pack a mattress in. I'll bet Hurricane and the Eskimos took turns sleepin' while you stayed awake."

He admits somethin' like that had happened, then goes into the marshal's bedroom and flops down on a spare cot. Hurricane stays at the hospital most of the night, hopin' for a change in Bill Mason. There ain't none.

I make the rounds of the country durin' the next few days. It's pretty well blanketed with claims and most of the boys are punchin' holes down to bedrock, but none of 'em are gettin' better'n colors. The gold is all concentrated just where Bill Mason said it would be.

"You boys had better get out of the country before snow flies," I tell 'em. "This

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ain't no place to spend the winter. You'll be hungrier than your minin' claims before spring comes."

In the days that follow they commence driftin' back to Nome. Even Les Brody's men pull their freight, which same surprises me. With three shifts workin', Stanton rebuilds the shaft down to bedrock. I'm one of the first to go down.

Stanton leads the way to the cross cut and uncovers a heap of gold stuffed into caribou skin pokes. Then we move on to the scene of operation. Bedrock has not only been swept, but it's been washed and scrubbed to get every bit of gold in the cracks. About two weeks' work is left before the concentration will be cleaned up.

He turns the flashlight on some untouched sand. It's yellow with gold. "You never saw anything like that before," he says.

"Only once. On the Klondike years ago," I answer. "It was the same there in certain pockets—more gold than sand."

The *Myrtle S.* drops anchor in the Inlet and discharges mail and supplies. I'm one of the first to go aboard. "I'm sendin' out a ton of gold," I tell the purser, "also several people, includin' one wounded man, Bill Mason."

"I'll accept the passengers and the gold," he answers. "I'll give the gold unusual care, but can't insure it, of course."

"I know. A ship operator can't afford to insure ship or cargo when it's in the Arctic," I tell him.

"Then it's understood," he says, "the responsibility of the gold is yours, McGee."

"The responsibility for loss between here and Nome is mine," I agree. "However you're to supply guards."

"Guards?" he asks, surprised. "No man's foolish enough to tackle a gold shipment on a steamer carrying United States mail. But . . . okay, I'll furnish you with guards."

"Not me," I point out; "the gold shipment."

Just as I'm ready to leave the *Myrtle S.*, Les Brody comes aboard. "I'll want space for myself and men," he said.

"I'm sorry," the purser answers. "I've just given McGee what I have left. We can't carry more than the legal limit of passengers you know."

"Yes, I know," Brody answers impatiently. "Heavy fine, and all that. But if someone should cancel a reservation I want a shot at the space."

"You'll head the list," the purser promises.

"Who're you taking out, McGee?" he asks.

"Several people," I reply, "and one prisoner."

"Prisoner?" he says, and I can see he's surprised. "Didn't know you'd made any arrests."

"I haven't yet," I admit. "Well, s'long."

BULLDOZER is special guard of the gold and puts in most of his time in the mine. Each day they take dirt to the surface, run it through sluice boxes and send the gold down to the cache. When the final clean-up is finished there's a ton of gold sure enough: around twenty-four thousand ounces that'll run a little better'n thirty dollars a ounce.

That much gold is a invitation to murder in any man's language. That much gold, too, means plenty of explainin' when the murderer tries to get rid of it.

Les Brody has that angle all figgered out, like as not. He's had plenty of time, because the *Myrtle S.* has been caught in pack ice and shows up at Stormy Inlet a week late. After I talk it over with the purser, we take the gold aboard in a umiak.

"Any space for me?" Brody asks again.

"I'm afraid not. People don't cancel reservations this time of the year," the purser answers. He turns to me. "We'll sail at ten o'clock tomorrow morning, McGee. Have your people aboard by nine-thirty, please."

"We can send Bill Mason aboard tonight," I tell him.

"He'll be more comfortable at the hospital," the purser says. "How's he getting along?"

"No change," I hate to admit. "I'll bring my prisoner aboard tonight."

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I go back to shore, prowl about camp awhile, then tap Luke Dexter on the shoulder. "Come along, Dexter. I'm holdin' you for murderous assault with a rifle on Bill Mason. Anything you say will be used again' you."

Dexter's eyes narrow. He's cool enough now. "Have you gone crazy, McGee?" he asks.

"No. I've knowed you was my man right along," I tell him. "Got all the evidence needed to convict. Didn't arrest you before because I didn't want to be bothered with a prisoner."

"I'm goin' to sue you for false arrest, defamation of character and all the rest, McGee," he snarls. "You've made the mistake of your life."

"Instead of snarlin' at me," I tell him, "you might give some thought to the man higher up. You might wonder if he'll go to bat for you or leave you holdin' the bag. I'm mentionin' no names. Don't need to, but you can tie to this, Dexter; if he thinks he's riskin' his own skin, he won't lift a hand to help you."

He's worried now and has some trouble maintainin' a poker face. I don't help matters along any by goin' to his shack and takin' the overalls with the patched knee. "I need these," I tell him, "for exhibit A."

THE camp is full of excitement as soon as Dexter's arrest is known. I take him aboard the *Myrtle S.* and the mate locks him up in the steamer's brig, which is down below and has a porthole six inches wide with bars across.

When I'm back on the beach, Stanton is roarin' his head off. "Dexter didn't shoot Mason," he argues. "He's been with us from the start. One of the best men I ever had."

"He made you think so, Stanton," I tell him. "Dexter is one of Brody's boys. A shock, ain't it? But it shouldn't be if you sleep on it a night or two." I grin. "Better pack your duds, we sail tomorrow mornin' at ten."

My next place of call is the hospital. "Hurricane," I say to Mary Kane, "if you don't want to slow down to a gentle breeze you've got to get sleep. Forget Bill tonight and rest, because you'll have him on your hands all the way to Nome."

"Can't we fly him there?" she asks. "The boat takes so long."

"Flying might take longer," I explain. "Bad weather sometimes grounds planes for days in this country, as you know from personal experience."

"I suppose you're right on both counts," she says thoughtfully. "After all Bill's quiet enough at night. Yes, I'll get a full night's sleep. It's a promise."

I turn in at eleven o'clock, havin' packed up what gov'ment property Cam McKay had brought in. At three o'clock I hear Hurricane calling, "No-Shirt McGee! Come quick!"

I pull on my pants and run outside, buttonin' up as I go. "What's wrong?"

"He's gone," she says in a agonized voice. "My Bill's gone. Wandered off."

"That's one thing you can't blame Luke Dexter for," Stanton says. He's dressin' too. Then Bulldozer joins us.

"No dirty cracks at No-Shirt," he growls at Stanton.

"None intended," Stanton answers. "But I hate to think a terrible mistake has been made."

We're all followin' Hurricane to the hospital as we talk. As we go inside the silence is so thick you can cut it with a knife. The young doc is starin' at the empty bed as if he expected Mason to suddenly materialize. "I looked in on him at midnight," he says, "and he was sleeping almost normally. In fact I thought he was beginning to regain his temporarily suspended mentality. Later he was gone. I noticed Miss Kane."

"We'll start a hunt, now," I tell him. "Take flashlights and see if we can pick up his tracks. The first man findin' them can signal by blinkin' his light."

Two minutes later me and Bulldozer are slowly circlin' the hospital, examinin' the muck for naked footprints. At the same time we turn the light slowly back and forth, hopin' to see his white nightgown.

Dawn is a long time in comin' and we're

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still huntin'. I make everybody go to the mine cookshack for a feed. Grub's low and the cook's goin' out on the steamer, but he manages flapjacks, coffee and bacon. Hurricane bolts her food and is off. Bulldozer follows and I scurry around camp linin' up reliable men to join in the hunt.

We spread, fan-like, from camp looking for Mason's trail. Bulldozer and Hurricane go along with me. I'm thinkin' of a lot of things. There's Hurricane, quiet and calm outside, but nearly crazy inside. There's Cam McKay, wounded and dependin' on me to hold down his job, and everything is goin' haywire.

The country is low and rollin' with plenty of little gulches that might hide a man, but there're no high ridges that we can climb to study the country. We're four miles from camp before Bulldozer yells, "There he is! See. Movin' over the tundra."

HURRICANE gives a glad little cry, then shakes her head. "That can't be Bill, Bulldozer. The man is dressed. Bill's clothes were all at the hospital. He'll be in his nightgown."

"That's right," Bulldozer agrees. "No-Shirt, why don't you swing towards him and find out if he's seen Bill. Me and Hurricane will go through that low spot, each'll take a gulch and we'll come out on the rise at the upper ends. If you bear towards us after talkin' to your man we'll all meet in three hours."

"You do have a good idea once in awhile," I answer. And with that I head towards the cuss. He's ploddin' steadily to the southwest and it takes me a couple of hours to get within a quarter mile of him. I cup my hands and yell, "Hey! Wait a minute!"

He turns, gives one look and starts runnin'. I drag out my old forty-four and fire a shot in the air. If he's got a gun he'll return the fire. If he's really innocent then he'll stop. If he's guilty of somethin' he'll run faster'n ever; then I can aim lower.

Well, he runs faster'n ever. I take a careful aim hopin' the lead'll carry that far and stop, but not hurt him. The bullet should be pretty well spent.

He looks back again and I get a look at his face. I feel cold all over. He's Bill Mason, or his twin brother. What's he doin' in somebody else's clothes? And how'd he get way out here? Also how am I goin' to catch him? Sure he's a wounded man and he's put in a stretch in bed, but he was tough from hard work before he was hit, and he can out-run me, or lick me in a rough and tumble fight because I won't feel like hittin' him. Too much chance of makin' his head wound worse.

I shift, hopin' to drive him towards the point Bulldozer will reach. It don't work. He skirts the border of a swamp and I can see he's goin' to stick to the high ground. I cross the swamp, hoppin' from one solid spot to another, like Eliza crossin' the ice in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Every hundred yards or so I got knee deep in the muck. I have to swim the last fifty yards, but it puts me close to Mason. He should be just over the next ridge. I stamp around, shakin' off the muck and water and catchin' my breath, then I top the ridge which ain't more'n twenty feet above the swamp. He's in a low spot two hundred yards away.

I keep below the ridge, work in front of him and drop down. "Hello, Bill," I say. "How're things at the mine?"

He gives me a queer look and backs away. He's out of his head, but the instinct to defend hisself is still there. If anything his mental condition makes him more crafty. It's as if the escape trickery of his cave ancestors has bridged the years to help him out.

"If I could just break through the veil," I growl, "the rest would be easy." Then I think of my badge—it's the sign of the law. And it's a refuge for honest folks in trouble. He takes one look and starts runnin' again.

My first thought is that maybe he is guilty of some crime and his conscience is makin' him run. But the second thought is better. Somehow he associates the law with the plot to cheat him out of his mine. I talk and try and calm him, at the same

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time followin' along. It don't work. He's younger and faster and he keeps out of reach.

I stop, find some half-dry grass on a high spot and build a fire. I kick away the surroundin' vegetation so it won't spread, then I heap on a lot of green stuff. This done I leave a note.

Bulldozer:
The man turned out to be Bill Mason. Still out of his head. I'm followin'.
No-Shirt,
Deputy U. S. Marshal.

Bulldozer should see the smoke and come to it, I reason.

IT'S late afternoon before I get another chance to cut in ahead of Mason. He's slowed down a lot, but so've I. I crouch behind a bunch of low willows and when he's opposite I jump out and grab him.

"Easy Bill!" I warn. "You've got to listen to me talk. Nobody's goin' to hurt you, but you'll hurt yourself, wanderin' around like this."

He lashes out at me and I keep tryin' to grab his hand. In two minutes I'm arm weary and he hangs a punch on my jaw. If he'd been strong it would've killed me. As it was I'm staggered and have to cover up.

"I'll kill you," he pants. "You asked for it, you blasted crook of a marshal. I'll kill you." As he comes in, he's open and I put everything I have into a punch.

It's a wonder my brittle bones don't snap, but they stand up. He kinda spins, then goes down on his face. I turn him over, puttin' my coat under his head at the same time fearfully studyin' his head bandage to make sure it ain't bleedin'.

I suppose he commences to mutter in a couple of minutes or so, but it seems a lifetime to me. He says, "I don't know much about the practical side of mining, but I'm no fool. I can sense trickery and I can add two and two and get four. I didn't kill that old miner, so it follows somebody else did. Somebody out to frame me. And I didn't shoot the old marshal, either."

I wait, listenin'. This is the kind of talk the doc said we might expect when the fog cleared away.

"This miners' meeting to elect a temporary marshal carried out its business too smoothly," he mutters. "It was cut and dried. Engineered by Les Brody. He knows I'm suspicious of him. And now I'm in jail and he's supposed to defend me from the mob. But he won't. I'll be lynched and . . . poor Mary. Mary and her dreams and mine."

I get it all now. His head is clearin' and he's thinkin' over what was in his mind just before the bullet hit. I've knowed men who had spells who'd stop in the middle of a sentence when the spell hit 'em, then pick up where they'd left off.

Suddenly he sets up. "By God, they won't take me alive. I'll go out there and fight. Open the door! Damn it, Brody, open this door!" His hands clench like he was shakin' bars on a door and slowly he opens his eyes.

"Hello, Bill Mason," I say in a low tone. I'm holdin' my breath.

He looks at me a long time and I can see the deadness has gone from his eyes. They're now the eyes of a young man who can fight hard, play hard and love hard.

"Who are you?" he asks. Then he presses his fingers again' his eyes. "Everything is swimming. What am I doing here?" He keeps his eyes closed tight and his fingers again' 'em. "Where's Brody? Where's the mob?"

CHAPTER V

DEEP DOWN UNDER

I BUILD another fire and he asks what it's for. "To bring help," I tell him, then I explain what has happened from the time I parachuted to Stormy Inlet to date.

"And the gold and Dexter are aboard the *Myrtle S.?*" he asks.

"And we'll be aboard her, too, when she sails," I tell him. "There's one more thing. Mary Kane is here. She flew north, then came by umiak from Shipwreck Harbor."

"She would," he says in an admirin'

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voice. "And she shouldn't. How is she?"

"Looks like a couple of million," I tell him.

"She's normal," he says.

"Do you know who put clothes on you and turned you loose?" I ask.

"I'm sorry, Mr. McGee," he answers, "but I can't recall a thing since the moment I was pacing my cell and insisting Brody let me out to fight."

That didn't surprise me any. It takes a half hour for Bulldozer and Hurricane to reach me. I hear them comin' and run out to meet 'em. "He's okay," I tell Hurricane, then I delay Bulldozer. "We're stayin' here five minutes," I tell him. We both stand there, hear her glad little cry and then its mighty still around the fire.

"It must be swell to be loved by a girl like her," Bulldozer says. "She'd make any man mend his ways. I fell for her like a ton of brick, then I got hold of myself—after a fashion. Say, how'd he get out of the hospital?"

"I think Les Brody slipped in and led him out," I answer. "He knew a man in a nightgown would be spotted at night. White shows up a long ways, so he brought old clothes."

"Even to boots so barefoot tracks wouldn't be left around for the searchers to follow," he says. "Brody's the most thorough man I've ever heard of. The idea was for him to get lost on the tundra and die. No-Shirt, ain't there some way of hangin' all this on Brody?"

"Yes," I answer, "If Luke Dexter cracks and talks."

We join the pair and she's settin' on the ground with her arms around him. "Let the world roll on," Bill Mason says. "I'm happy."

"We've got to help it roll," I tell him. "You go back on a stretcher tomorrow. We'll have to camp here tonight. There won't be much to eat. On the other hand even Bulldozer couldn't make it to the Inlet after dark. He'd get mired down in a swamp."

We dry out tundra and make a bed for Bill. then me and Bulldozer go prospectin' for fuel. Anything that'll burn is hauled in. Sometimes it's dead tundra, again it's willows Bulldozer's pulled up by the roots. They hiss and steam, but in the end burn.

It's a long night and we start movin' at the first streaks of dawn. Bulldozer sets off at top speed and me, Hurricane and Bill Mason walk slow, with plenty of rest.

It's noon before Bulldoger shows up again. He's swingin' along, followed by a dozen men packin' a stretcher. With three crews of four men each to carry the load we should make good time.

Bulldozer's winded when he reaches us. "More hard luck, No-Shirt," he pants. "The steamer sailed ten o'clock last night. The skipper left word he'd waited as long as he dared. A wind was bringin' in a heavy Arctic fog and he had a hunch he might run into ice trouble. Besides, he figgers to make one more round trip before the breeze-up and every day counts. Les Brody and some of his men took the space you reserved for us. They're on their way out."

"With the gold," Bill says.

"But in the custody of a purser," I add. "Don't worry, Brody isn't fool enough to pull a holdup." But I'm wonderin' what he will do.

WE PUT Bill on the stretcher and start back. Camp is dark and gloomy when we arrive, but there's a light in the hospital and the young doc is still there. "I had to sock him one, doc," I explain, "and it cleared his head. He's back to normal."

"That sometimes happens," he answers. "But we'll keep him in bed a while. You missed the boat. What are your plans?"

"Send for a plane," Bill says. "We can be in Nome when the *Myrtle S.* arrives. I can stand bumpy weather in the air."

"That's best," Hurricane agrees. "I'll ask Mr. Stanton to radio Fairbanks or Nome, either one. There's a hospital at Nome, too."

The fog is almost black and everything it touches glazes over. It hangs on for days and all we can do is cuss and pray for a change in weather. No sense in trying to reach Nome or Shipwreck Harbor in bad

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weather, by skin boat. Several times we hear a plane overhead.

After ten days we get a break in the fog and a hour later a wheel job lands on the beach after bouncin' all over the place. It's the same pilot that brought me in. "Glad to see you alive, McGee," he says. "As soon as we can smooth out the beach we'll take off."

"How many people can you carry?"

"Is Mason a stretcher case?"

"No. He can set up," I answer.

"Five, the weather and takeoff being what they are," he answers.

The passengers are Hurricane, Bill, me, Bulldozer and Stanton. We fly by instrument to Nome, punch a hole through the clouds and roll onto the landin' field. Boy, it's sure good to be on the ground again.

Bill stands the trip in fine shape and checks in at a hotel instead of the hospital. I make a bee line for the freight and passenger agent of the *Myrtle S.*

"She's missing," he says. "She reported by radio she was off Shipwreck Harbor in a dense fog, but was on her course. Then the routine reports stopped. We've checked with Coast Guard and other vessels in the Arctic, Bering Sea and Pacific. None received an sos call. Of course she may have struck a rock and gone down before the operator could send a message. Or the radio may be out of commission."

"Even so," I argue, "she should've been here by now." He nods and all I can think of is the *Myrtle S.* is missing with Les Brody and a ton of gold aboard.

AS SOON as the weather clears me and Bulldozer charter a seaplane and commence the search. "You're responsible for the gold," he says. "Can Bill and Hurricane sue you?"

"They can sue me or the steamer, I don't know which," I admit, "prob'ly me, because if the steamer's sunk there won't be much to collect. I'm in hopes she's aground."

"We didn't have much more trouble when we took the schooner through the war zone," he says.

The pilot goes back and forth, quarterin' hundreds of square miles of water like a setter dog coverin' a field. He's just about to go back for fuel when Bulldozer spots somethin' through the binoculars. We head for it and pretty soon it proves to be a umiak full of people.

We land and I look at those aboard. There's a man with a captain's cap on his head; several others who look like sailors, and—Les Brody. "It's them," I tell Bulldozer. "Survivors of the *Myrtle S.*"

Bulldozer draws a long breath. "And it's a cinch she ain't carryin' a ton of gold," he says. "She's got about two and a half ton of people, which puts her down to the water's edge."

The umiak comes sluggishly alongside. "If you've got any sick or hurt people," I yell at the captain, "we'll take 'em aboard. We'll fly back to Nome with 'em. The pilot has already reported to the Coast Guard. How many missing?"

"One," the skipper answers. "A prisoner, Luke Dexter. She went down so fast we couldn't get below in time to open the jail."

"Yeah?" Bulldozer softly jeers. "Damned queer Dexter would be the only one to die. The man you expected to crack and spill evidence again' Brody."

"It is," I agree. "But we won't mention it to outsiders. There's plenty of questions to be asked and answered. The ship's log should show where she sank, and from that we can figger the chances of salvage." I raise my voice. "I'll take you to Nome, Captain. Come aboard and bring your log book with you."

"The log book was lost, sir," he answers. "She went down so fast the engineer and firemen were nearly trapped. It was one o'clock in the mornin' and everybody was asleep."

"Come aboard," I repeat. "And you, too, Brody." I pick two others I want to question and as soon as they're in their seats we take off for Nome.

AT NOME I question each separately, startin' in on Brody. "I know very little," he says. "Naturally when you

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weren't on hand to take up your space I asked for it. The purser gave it to me."

"Okay," I say. "Then what?"

"We were in a fog much of the time and I slept. I was asleep when she began going down," he says. "I was called, got into my clothes and just had time to reach the umiak they had launched. I lost all of my personal belongings."

"What about Dexter?"

"Poor devil was trapped below," he answers. "Nobody could reach him. She went down too fast."

"Did she hit a rock?"

"Not that I know of," he answers.

I let him go and send for the captain. He's a youngish cuss who's spent most of his life in the Arctic. He's worried. "Listen, McGee," he says before I can put a question, "I'm in a jam. I had a drink of whisky while I was on watch and I passed out."

"You did, eh?" I say. "Then you need another. And you ain't on watch, either."

I pour him a man-sized drink and take one myself. He hesitates, then downs it. I ask him about the Arctic and a lot of other unimportant questions, while waitin' for the whiskey to take effect. After a while I get to the point, "You took *one* drink and passed out?"

"Yeah," he admits. "I had an empty stomach, or something."

"You've just taken another drink on a empty stomach and you ain't passin' out," I tell him. "Who gave you the drink?"

"Nobody. It was my own private stuff. I kept it in a locker in the wheel house," he explains. "It gets pretty cold up there in those black fogs. A little snort helps at times."

"How come your quartermaster didn't call the mate when you passed out?" I ask.

"I was at the wheel, McGee," he admits. "You know how it is on small trading steamers. We have a small crew and sometimes when we've had to work all hands pretty hard, the mates, or even the skipper will stand a wheel watch along with his own."

"The quartermaster was below?"

"Yeah."

"What time did you take the drink?"

"I don't know," he answers. "I took over at eight o'clock, had the drink later on, and they tell me she began goin' down around midnight. You see, she's a tight steamer and she hadn't struck. Nobody was expecting a leak. The first thing the engineer on watch knew was when water spilled through a bulkhead door. He started the pumps and called the bridge. There was no answer so he called the chief.

"The chief, a mighty good friend, found me. He called the first mate, then went below. The water was pourin' in by that time. He ordered the fire pulled to prevent a explosion, then got his men on deck."

"Something queer about this," I tell him.

"I know it," he admits. "And maybe a ton of gold is back of it all."

I nod. "Where'd she go down?"

"It depends on what course the steamer took while I was out. She does twelve knots at full speed. And we were going that," he answers.

"In a fog?"

"Sure," he said. "We'd been slowed down for a long time, on account of navigation hazards. I took soundings and knew from the depth, temperature of the water and type of bottom we were in the clear. No other steamers in the Arctic and no ice, so full speed ahead was safe. We were ten miles off shore."

I SPREAD out a chart. "Trace in this red pencil, a line showing your position when you took the drink," I tell him, "and the point where she could've been when she went down."

"Here's where we were when I took the drink," he says. "After that she might've gone around in circles, straight ahead, or even headed north again. I can't tell. Everyone was asleep, so passengers and crew can't help."

"You got no bearings after she went down?"

"None until several days later and that was in the approximate position where you sighted us. We had been in freezing mists blown along by a stiff breeze," he says.

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"You sighted us here." He makes a notation on the chart.

There is quite a lot of water between the point where he took a drink and where I sighted the umiak. It was reasonable to suppose the wreck was closer to the latter point. But even so they could've done a lot of driftin'.

"Have you anything in mind?" he asks. "Because if that wreck isn't located a lot of heads will fall. You'll lose everything, Cam McKay will be fired for appointing an incompetent man and—"

"I had in mind spottin' the wreck from the air," I said. "Or draggin' for it."

"You might spot it from the air," he says. "Is that a trick you learned in the war zone?"

"One of 'em," I admit. "The English were spotting submarines that way."

"You won't get far with dragging," he says. "Plenty of rocks on the bottom to foul your drag. As most of 'em aren't charted you'd have to make sure each time it was a rock and not the wreck. It might take a lifetime."

He stood up, heavily. "If you're through with me I might as well go. I've got to make a report to the government men, and when it's all over I'll prob'ly lose my ticket and be stranded on the beach."

"Cheer up," I tell him. "We may get out of this mess yet."

After he's gone I go over everything in my mind again and again, then I set down and write a letter, put a blank check inside of the envelope and a airmail stamp on the outside, then I go down to the post office and mail it.

CHAPTER VI

DEAD MAN'S STORY

ME AND Bulldozer are settin' in our room when he unloads this one on me. "A good bookkeeper balances his books every so often, No-Shirt."

"You heard that somewheres," I tell him. "What're you drivin' at?"

"This deputy marshal business," he answers. "You're a nervous wreck and you come north to quiet down. Then you get into excitement up to your ears. What's it gettin' you?" He shakes his head dubiously. "Nothin'! And it's liable to cost you plenty dough, not to forget a fair to middlin' reputation."

"If it helps Cam McKay hold his job, I'm paid in full," I tell him.

"Right now it looks as if you're makin' the loss of his job a cinch," he says.

"That's true. But if I hang somethin' on Les Brody, I'm paid in full twice," I go on. "And if I give a hand to a pair like Bill Mason and Hurricane—"

"I know," he interrupts. "You'll be paid six times. We won't argue that. I like her and him so well I won't even make a play for her. What's next, Heaven's gift to squaws?"

"Them's fightin' words," I roar. He pushes me back in my chair and asks what we do tomorrow.

Well, we charter a plane and fly to Shipwreck Harbor, and find Cam McKay settin' up with a pillow at his back. He knows what's happened, but he ain't holdin' it again' me. He's all smiles, but in a off-guard moment I catch the worried look you see on old folks' faces when their job starts slippin'.

Next day we commence to fly back and forth over the water. I've got keen-eyed Eskimo kids as well as Bulldozer lookin' out of the plane, tryin' to spot the wreck. The pilot uses up all the fuel, goes back to Nome and flies in with a load. We keep at it, day after day. Fogs ground us, and winds ripple the water, but we have clear stretches and make the most of them.

"Wherever it is," the pilot says at last, "it's not visible from the air. Water's too deep, or is clouded by currents."

"I guess we might as well give up spotting it from the air," I tell him. "Fly back to Nome and if there's any big mail, bring it. Find out how Bill Mason and Mary Kane are getting along. Let me know if Les Brody is still hangin' 'round."

It's ten days before he comes back. He's got a package that came all the way from the East Coast by air mail. "That cost

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plenty," he says. "By the way, Brody's at Nome and so are Mason and the girl."

The next mornin' me and Bulldozer take my package of air mail, buy a umiak and start sailin'. We've got plenty of grub and once a day we go ashore to a place where we've made a camp, and cook up a batch. We take turns at steerin' the canoe. Sometimes the man off duty sleeps, and sometimes he talks. We keep at it day and night.

The Eskimos think we're crazy, and sometimes I wonder if they ain't right. It don't make sense to them, this cruisin' back and forth, never stoppin' to harpoon a whale, nor shoot a walrus.

EARLY one mornin' I wake up Bulldozer. "Help me get the sail down," I tell him. At the same time I keep the umiak movin' around in a circle. When the sail's down he grabs a paddle and we both paddle slowly back and forth.

"Okay," I yell, "this is the spot." He drops a concrete block overboard and fifty feet of line follow it, then there's slack. I make a float fast, then we put up the sail again and go to camp.

Here we ship a outboard motor, several fathoms of wire and a drag. We cruise back and forth about the float, then suddenly the drag fouls. We haul in the wire until we're over the spot, then paddle back and forth huntin' for a angle that'll release it.

After a while it clears and we haul it up. Bulldozer looks at the hooks on the drag. "They've scraped hull paint," he said. "Look."

I look. The paint's the same color as that on the *Myrtle S.'s* hull. "No-Shirt," he says, "You've done the impossible—located the wreck."

We go back to Shipwreck Harbor and radio for a plane, and the next day it lands us in Nome. The first man I meet is Brody. "When you going south?" he asks.

"Don't know," I answer. "I'm still deputy marshal until Cam McCay is on his feet again."

"Cam McKay is going to be removed from office," he says. "I've seen to that. There's been plenty of unsolved crime recently. I expect to take over the deputyship in that region."

"You'll work different," I say. "Instead of dog teams and such you'll use gas boats and planes."

He gives me a funny look. "What's the matter with gas boats?" he asks. "They travel in all kinds of weather."

"I think they're fine," I tell him.

He keeps lookin' at me with suspicion. "So I ain't goin' out for a while yet," I add. "I hear a mail is due, so I might as well lay over and take it to Shipwreck Harbor with me."

That night I make a dicker for a lighter, towboat and fully equipped diver. "Sail at midnight," I direct, "and keep all this confidential."

The boys do a good job of it, and when I'm at the post office the followin' afternoon, waitin' for the mail to be distributed there's plenty of gossip, but no mention made of the barge sneakin' out after dark.

I get the Shipwreck Harbor letters and fly to the harbor. "Cheer up, Cam," I tell the old deputy marshal, "plenty is goin' to happen you'll like."

"I'd resign my job and go to panhandlin' if I thought by doin' so I could send Les Brody over the road," he says. "The dirty slicker."

"He's smooth, but the best ones slip," I tell him, "and nobody should know that better than a old marshal."

WHEN the barge anchors over the wreck me and Bulldozer go out in the umiak. A diver goes down and reports it's the *Myrtle S.* and she's on a even keel. "Several of the lower deadlights are open," he says. "That's why she flooded so fast."

"Somebody opened them," I tell him. "They was all dogged down when she left Stormy Inlet. The skipper checked on 'em in person."

He's down a long time, then he comes up and the helmet is pulled off. "I've got to get warmed up and rest," he says. "Plenty cold down there. I located the gold and forced open the door. I went forward and below, to the jail. It wasn't hard, be-

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cause I'm familiar with all boats running out of Nome. It pays when you have to go down to them. The door leading into the passage was locked. I forced it. Went on to the jail door and forced that."

"Was—" I began.

He nods. "Yeah. I found Luke Dexter's remains. And this bottle, jammed between the bars over his porthole. He tried to push the bottle through, hoping it would float ashore and be found. The bars were too close."

I break the bottle and read the scrawled paper inside. I read it aloud, then I get those present to initial it, so they can testify it's the real McCoy later on.

The diver don't go down again, but gets a night's rest and is ready the next day. He sends up the gold and it is stowed away aboard the tug, then he goes down once more and sends up Dexter's remains.

"I guess that's all," I tell the diver and barge skipper. "Just head for Nome. I'll join you before you get there. I've business in Shipwreck Harbor."

Me and Bulldozer make the trip in the umiak and I go to the deputy marshal's office, take out the official stationery and write out a report which says all recent murders in the region have been solved and arrests made. Then I take it over to Cam McKay. "Sign here," I order.

He signs, then says, "Hold on! My mother told me never to sign anything I hadn't read. This may be a petition to hang me for all I know." He reads it then snorts. "This won't go. I'm gettin' credit for all you've done. It ain't right."

"And you'd have been the goat if I failed," I argue. "The credit belongs to you. And I'd like to see anybody blast you out of your job now. Sure, you'll need a deputy awhile longer, and I may stick around; but you're the boss."

Then before he can argue more I yank the paper from his hands. "I won't mail it until I 'tend to a little business in Nome," I promise.

A couple of Eskimos with a umiak put us aboard the tug when it's halfway to Nome. We cross the bar after dark. Bulldozer stands guard while I make arrangements to take the gold to the bank, and Dexter's remains to the morgue.

THE news spreads like wildfire. Bill Mason and Hurricane look me up to find out if it's true. "But how did you locate the *Myrtle S.?*" he asks.

"It's a long story," I answer. "Oh, hello, Brody."

"I want to congratulate you on finding the wreck," he says. "I don't know how you did it, but you did." Depend on him to make a grandstand play of doin' the right thing.

"The gold was a incident," I tell him. "The important thing was my work as deputy marshal. I've cleared up the various killings and . . ."

Slowly his hand goes inside his coat. He's wonderin' if he can slip from the hotel, reach the airport and head south. Suddenly the gun comes out, then it's knocked to the floor and his nose is bleedin'. Bulldozer's hit him.

"You might listen to this, Brody," I tell him. "They claim dead men tell no tales. And that was your idea when you made sure Dexter would drown, but it didn't work out that way. Listen:

To Whoever Gets This:

The ports are open somewhere. I can hear the water coming in. A few minutes ago Les Brody came in. He made sure my cell door was locked, then he left and locked the passage door. I think the steamer's going to sink and he's making sure I die. He's after the gold, and has wanted it from the first. I think he figgers to sink the steamer and salvage it later. If he was marshal he could do it without being caught.

"What a calm fellow he was in the face of death," Bill Mason says, "I'd have never guessed it."

"Many a man will surprise you in the showdown," I tell him. Then continue:

Me and Brody have played the game together a long time. I told him if he ever crossed me I'd get even, but I'd play the game as long as he did. He planted his men in Mason's mine, and they made

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trouble. I kept Stanton from firing them.

Brody killed the old miner and made it look as if Mason had done it. Brody shot Cam McKay. Just as No-Shirt McGee figgered, I shot Mason. I was to get him if the crowd didn't. When McGee took charge, I let Mason have it. I'm sure Brody was the one who took Mason from the hospital and turned him loose on the tundra.

The water's getting deeper in the cell, It won't be long. I'll try and force the bottle through the bars, and hope somebody will find it.

May be this ain't legal, but it's written by a man who knows he's going to die and who wants to go out clean.

Luke Dexter.

As I finish a murmur of rage goes through those standing around. "Come on, Brody," I order, "I'm going to lock you up before you get some of the dose you tried to hand Bill Mason. You won't admit it, but I think you got the skipper's bottle, slipped in a Mickey Finn then took over. I think, too, you headed for water shallow enough for a diver to operate, yet deep enough so that a plane wouldn't spot the wreck from the air."

He don't say a word, but I know I'm right, and that was the reason me and Bulldozer sailed back and forth over water between eight and twelve fathoms deep. It was the only answer to the whole mystery, and when you've only one answer it's well to look into it.

We lock him up, then I mail Cam McKay's report. After that we go to the hotel. Bill Mason and Hurricane have to thank us again—and ask questions.

"How'd you finally locate the wreck?" he asks.

"Figgerin' Brody would sink it in shallow, protected water near shore," I explain, "I cruised back and forth in such places and passed up the rest. That saved time. The wreck, by the way, is in a good position, and her owners can raise her and make Brody pay the damages."

"But how'd you spot her?"

"Oh, I can't take credit for that," I answer. "It was a trick I learned when I was in the war zone. Over there they had magnetic mines. When a steel ship passed over, the needle tipped up and made contact. I figgered if a ship was below, a compass needle would dip down, so I had a special compass made and shipped, airmail, from the East Coast. And, sure enough, the needle tipped down when we passed the *Myrtle S.*"

I get up and stifle a yawn. "I'm tired. Goodnight folks. See you in the mornin'."

"Goodnight, No-Shirt," Hurricane answers and starts for the stairs. I suddenly jerk my head around for another look. By golly, she's got as well turned a ankle as ever I did see.

"Come on, Heaven's gift to squaws," Bulldozer says, jammin' his thumb between my ribs. "I can see you're gettin' better, but you still need plenty of sleep. Doctor's orders."

THE END

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

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Dr. Kildare's Crisis

By MAX BRAND

A little fleck of blood showed in the corner of Lamont's mouth. Kildare knew that his first guess had been right

Start now this engrossing story of the hardest problem young Jimmy Kildare ever had to face—and the way he solved it

NOW, when it seems that there will never be time enough to do the things that he must do, DR. JIMMY KILDARE is brought up short by a man on fire—a man burning with an idea for saving the world.

Already there is too much in Kildare's life.

DR. GILLESPIE, that great-hearted diagnostic genius whom Jimmy acknowledges as master, is slowly dying of cancer; he is feverishly teaching Jimmy everything he can in the little time that is left.

Everyone comes to Kildare for advice and help—like JOE WEYMAN, the ambulance driver, who has been hitting the liquor hard and is beginning to ask the doc for pick-me-ups. Fond as he is of Joe, Kildare turns him down; warns him that the ambulance job is getting him, and that he ought to quit.

Then there is Nurse MARY LAMONT, Jimmy's fiancee—lucky when she can steal a minute from the thoughts of this young doctor whom she pretty despairingly adores.

But this time Kildare must listen: because it is DOUGLAS LAMONT, Mary's brother, who comes to him in a frenzy of enthusiasm for his project. And there is something in that frenzy that holds Jimmy's keen diagnostic eye.

Something wrong. . . .

This story began in last week's Argosy

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YET the idea itself, Jimmy admits, is magnificent. It is a plan for resettlement of thousands from city slums: each family on a little tract of its own, building its own shelter, providing its own sustenance from the soil, learning new dignity and joy and self-reliance.

Lamont is a teacher of economics; he has concluded that a staggering amount of leisure time is frittered away in silly and wasteful pursuits. Turn that leisure into genuine, creative play—building decently the materials of our own lives about us—and we would become a people of new strength.

Kildare sees a glimmering of the possibilities here; but he has a disturbing doubt. A program like that must be sold by a man possessed of the idea—by Lamont, in short. And yet Lamont, in his quick changes from lethargy to intense excitement, shows symptoms of a man who is not well. Just how, Kildare cannot determine.

But Jimmy is worried, trusting his strange, intuitive ability to detect illness, no matter how well hidden.

But he gives way before Mary's urging and Lamont's scorn; he calls PAUL MESSENGER, a tremendously powerful man who is in Dr. Kildare's debt; he arranges a meeting for Lamont. If anyone can supply the wealth and influence for this project, it is Messenger.

And Messenger is caught up by the vision which Lamont sets before him. Rejoicing at this success, Mary returns to Kildare's office—and hears Jimmy telephoning to Messenger: "It's simply that I guess at something pathologically wrong with him. . . . I'm only telling you this because I had to introduce him to you. . . . I don't know what's wrong. Nerves, perhaps . . ."

HOUNDED by a new fear, Mary goes to her room in the Nurses' Home; she refuses to confide even in grand old MOLLY CAVENDISH, the finest—and most severe—head nurse in history.

Nerves, perhaps . . . The phrase may have many meanings. Mary remembers, now, a sickening vague shadow out of her family's past. At length she writes to her cousin Charles: *Suddenly I've found myself thinking about our grand-uncle, Peter . . . just a ghost of a memory that something horrible happened to him. . . . I remember a big man with wild hair and a tremendous voice, always shouting. . . . I simply have to find out what became of him.*

After she has sealed the letter, the taste of the mucilage becomes part of the strange dread that has possessed her. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE GROWL OF KILDARE

HER telephone rang. The voice of Douglas said: "Hello, Mary? Hello! Hello! . . . Ah, there you are! Now, my dear, I've something a bit ugly to say to you. But we always come clean with one another, we Lamonts, don't we?"

"Of course we do," she said.

"What's the matter? You sound stifled? Have you been weeping?"

"No, Douglas; there's simply something wrong with the phone. *You* sound a little dim, too."

"Do I? I don't feel dim. I feel damned bright and burning. Burned up, in fact!"

"Didn't it turn out well, Douglas? I saw you leave the building with Messenger and I thought he seemed so interested."

"Did I walk right over you and never give you a look? Forgive me for that, Mary. I only remembered this minute that you were to wait for me there. But I had Messenger on the run and I couldn't think of anything else."

"That's the only thing worth talking about. I *knew* that he was hypnotized. Oh, I'm so glad!"

"He *was* hypnotized. You know the rich; there's a decent impulse in them—a desire to give back what they've taken—a queer thing, partly good, partly merely for the sake of reputation—you know?"

"I know."

"I lined out the idea as briskly as I could. I never felt better, Mary. The thing came rushing out, you see. It came out whole and entire, like a living birth. And that fellow has a fine eye, understanding, bright, a little impatient at first until I'd grabbed his interest.

"He took me home with him. I talked a good deal more. He wasn't bored. He was fascinated. God bless him. There's a noble fellow! I loved him for the way he listened.

"And it seemed to me that there was a way opening for all the laborers of America—all the poor of the world—all the

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unhappy devils who walk on concrete pavements instead of earth with life in it—it seemed to me that a way was opening for them to a real existence. And then—crash!"

"No, Douglas!"

"I tell you, I was at the top of the mountain, and now I'm almost at the bottom of the sea. I've not been thrown out, mind you. Everything still is courtesy and hope. But the heart's gone out of things. There's doubt, now, instead of faith. That's the acid that eats away the soul of a man. It's better to have faith in the devil than no faith at all."

"Douglas, what's happened? You're so *terribly* violent."

"I'll take hold of myself. It was this way: Mr. Messenger, when we got to his house, left word that we were not to be disturbed for anything, not even for an earthquake; then he took me into his private study. And the world was mine, Mary, until an interruption *did* come."

"In spite of what Mr. Messenger—"

"There's someone more important than earthquakes in the Messenger house. You'll see. I had Messenger on the verge of writing *checks!* And then there was a knock at the door and a servant appeared. 'I told you not to interrupt us!' says Messenger, very angry. The servant didn't bat an eye. He even smiled a little. 'But this is Doctor Kildare on the telephone, sir,' he says. You hear me, Mary?"

"I hear you," she said, faintly.

That raging violence which was coming to her over the wire had still been bringing up the words of Kildare as she overheard them at his office: "I don't know what's wrong; nerves, perhaps."

"WELL, this magic name of Kildare got Messenger right up and out of the room. He excused himself to me. He said: 'There's one name that has to take precedence over everything else in this house.' And he went out.

"When he came back, a long time later, he was a different man. The fire had gone out of him."

"It may be, Douglas, that he'd simply escaped from the warmth of your argument. He wasn't seeing it all as clearly."

"Nonsense. He couldn't have changed that fast if someone had not been working on him. He asked me to carry on with what I had been saying. But when I talked, I saw that his heart was not in listening to me. Mind you, there was a queer way that Kildare had of looking at me, today."

"No, no, Douglas!"

"I tell you, I saw it and I felt it. The man may love you, my dear, but he doesn't like your brother. Paul Messenger, five minutes after he came back from the telephone — and Jimmy Kildare — was standing up as a sign that I was through for the day. He was saying that after all he was, in spite of a great interest, by no means capable of pronouncing on a matter that needed the opinion of a sound economist and a welfare worker and someone who already had had experience in repatriating city labor back to the soil. He would arrange for a meeting between me and three or four men of that sort. He would have to depend upon their judgment. Damn it all, Mary, what has Kildare against me? Why does he hate me?"

"He doesn't hate you, Douglas. There's no hatred in him. There's no cruelty or deceit in him."

"Isn't there? I'm going to talk to him, face to face. I don't stab other people in the back, and I don't expect them to stab me."

She cried out to him, but his receiver clanged hard on the hook.

I don't know what's wrong; the nerves, perhaps, Kildare had said.

And now, as she thought back upon her brother as she had known him, there was a great change between the calm, methodical scientist and this man of fire, this impatient force, raging at restraints. A great change indeed—in the nerves, perhaps.

She gathered her strength like something that had fallen from her and left her in a naked weakness. After that, she left

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her room and went back to the hospital as fast as she could.

Whatever happened, she knew that she must keep this fire-new brother of hers away from Kildare, somewhat as she would have wished to keep wildcat away from bulldog. So she came hurrying once more into the waiting room of Gillespie and through it to the door of Kildare.

But there was no need for her to rap at the door. She could hear through it, not the words, but the voices: the high snarl of Douglas Lamont, and the deeper growl of Kildare.

CHAPTER VI

SEE YOUR DOCTOR

TO KILDARE, the brother of Mary Lamont had claims to a humane and earnest consideration; but he was above all a sick man.

That was why he could not help regarding Douglas Lamont with a professional eye; and the professional eye of a doctor, without mercy, kindness, or any human consideration, probes at the truth and nothing but the truth, which mind and spirit and body seem concerned only in hiding from him. So Kildare received Douglas Lamont, in spite of the best intentions, somewhat as a fencer receives an opponent on the point of a foil.

The head of Lamont, bowed as that of the scholar often is at the book-angle, was lifted now. He looked at Kildare with a fierce insistence, saying: "What is it, man? What's put you against me?"

"I'm not against you," answered Kildare.

Lamont brushed protestations aside with a gesture of both hands.

"I can guess at a good deal of it," he said. "You and Mary want to be married one of these days. The result is that you're jealous of people who have an old hold on her. Isn't that it?"

"No," said Kildare.

"Let's be frank," argued Lamont. "It's only human nature. A girl's past is the only thing about her that doesn't belong to her husband, eh? Even fathers and older brothers are damned nuisances. Aren't they?"

"I don't think so," answered Kildare.

"Ah, but it isn't a matter of thinking, so much as instinct. You can't help being against me; but let's have it out in the open. That's the best way, isn't it?"

"Of course, if there's anything to argue about."

There was a sort of lifting and lightening of Lamont, a gathering of forces and then a repression of them.

"Why did you stab me in the back with Paul Messenger?" he asked.

"Stab you? In the back?"

"He was called to the telephone to talk to you. He was in my hand when he went from the room. He was out of my hand when he came back. What did you say to him?"

"I agreed with him that when you talk of your project you could set anyone on fire. I agreed with him that if you can stick out the job you're likely to put it through. But I told him that I thought you were a sick man."

"Sick?" cried Lamont. "A *sick* man? Take my pulse, my temperature. I tell you, I never felt half so well in my life. Well? Why, I'm lifted out of myself! If I'm ill, give the illness a name, my friend!"

"I can't do it," said Kildare, still narrowing his eyes as he watched the other.

"In law," said Lamont, "a man is innocent until he's proved guilty. In medicine it seems that there's a different rule."

His anger lifted his voice and gave an edge to it.

"I know how this seems to you," said Kildare, "and I don't blame you for being angry. It's hard for me to explain to you. I have to carry with me a sort of blueprinted pattern of normality which means good health; and where there are variations, I feel them sometimes when I can't give them a definite name."

"Do you mind telling me what it is that you *feel* about me?" asked Lamont.

"I feel that you're burning yourself up."

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"Burning myself up? Overworking, you mean?"

"No. Not the work. Right now you feel as if you could lift a mountain, don't you?"

"More or less."

"Usually people don't have that sense of energy in their fingertips. Perhaps I sound like a stodgy fool; but usually men feel they can move the mountain that would break the giant's back—but only if they take it away a backload at a time."

"It's because I have confidence. That's it, isn't it?"

"We all prefer to see confidence. It's like a success story. But you're on fire, Douglas. Even when you sleep you have dreams of millions of men and women persuaded and doing as you tell them to do."

LAMONT smiled a little at that and nodded; then plunged on with increased fervor.

"I have dreams of millions of happy people: the same poor devils whose unhappiness I've seen in the day. Mind you, Jimmy, I've approached these problems the cold-blooded way. I've come at the social problems of economics through textbooks and then through grinding months of field work. I've heard dry professors talking and taken ten thousand pages of shorthand notes on them. I've laid a deep soil; but only recently a seed has germinated in that soil, and now the plant is growing, and it is going to be seen by the world.

"There's something in my heart and mind, Kildare, that is going to help millions. I don't want fame. I don't want glory. I'd rather do an anonymous job. But there are men and women as sound as oak who are turning into weeds because their hands are idle, and their brains are standing still, and therefore their souls are rotting in them!

"You talk to me about dreams? I still dream when I'm awake, and God pity the man who keeps those dreams from coming true."

"I'll never try to balk them," said Kildare.

"You will, and you do, and you *have* tried," said Lamont. "But why should I complain? I've made the truth shine in the eyes of Messenger, and I'll make it shine in the eyes of his experts, as he calls them. Damn the experts, I say. An expert is a book, not a man; his knowledge is a card index system. *You're* an expert, Kildare, and you're applying the cold poison of your remembered knowledge and your childish suspicion to me.

"But that's dull stuff compared with the thing that's in me. It's weeds compared with a cutting edge. And you, and all conservative thought like you, I'll mow down in my path and open a way to a new hope, a new chance for the stupid, the suffering, the inept, the soul-weary!"

He changed, suddenly, from anger to compassion, and caught the hand of Kildare.

"Forgive me for being excited and angry," he said. "It seemed to me that since you love Mary you would have to love my plan. But I understand. Ordinary human nature revolts against high hopes and expectations. Everything important is a miracle until it's accomplished. I shall talk to you again, Jimmy. I shall lead you gently to a clearer understanding of what is bound to come. It cannot fail. I feel—I feel as if God had commissioned me!"

He left the room suddenly, without a farewell, and slammed the door to behind him.

Kildare moved to follow him, but instead he turned back to the diminishing stack of charts, the slide-rule, and the mass of figures which began to form a thick mist through which, very dimly, he was beginning to see the outlines of a destination, as one sees the loom and shadow of distant hills through a fog.

Long ago, in the days of his medical school studies when he was working his way through college, he had had to learn how to keep his two worlds of study and of outside work apart, perfecting that fine art of concentration which enables the mind to establish an exact focus and maintain it. Now he put the thought of Douglas Lamont

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aside, and with it all that exacting problem of the uncompleted diagnosis.

He grew aware, a little later, that someone else was in the room.

THERE was a soft rustling of papers, and then the crisp flicking of cards, all the sounds as quietly produced as possible.

That would be Mary, of course. She came vaguely into his consciousness, was dismissed; persistently returned, touching him like eyes that are fixed on the small of one's back. He dropped the chart-work from his mind and turned to her.

"What is it, Mary?" he asked.

She laughed a little.

"I'm getting the cards of the gout patients together," she said. "Dr. Gillespie wants them."

He remained turned in his chair until she glanced at him.

"There's something wrong," he said.

"Why, no," she answered.

"You're worrying. It's about Douglas," he told her.

"No. There's only a touch of a headache. That's all."

"Look at me, will you?"

"Well?"

"You haven't a headache."

"I have, though. Just a slight one behind the eyes."

He gave a glance at his work, then rose reluctantly and gave her his full attention.

"I'm not going to be diagnosed, Jimmy," she said, starting out of the room.

"Don't go; please," said Kildare.

She turned at the door.

"Jimmy, don't be difficult," she said.

"You're upset," he declared. "And it's about Douglas. He's been telling you that I'm dead set against him. Isn't that it?"

"That doesn't matter. Not between you and me," she said.

"Wait a minute," said Kildare. He went over to her, slowly.

"I see," she said. "I'm about to be examined, so I ought to face the light."

She faced it, smiling.

He said, looking closely into her eyes: "Douglas has been a big fellow in your life. He's the one you've formed a habit about. A habit of looking up to him."

"That's right," she agreed. "And so?"

"Stop smiling that way."

"All right. I'll give up smiling, Jimmy."

He laughed. "I mean, you're being so damned motherly and making a small boy out of me."

"You're not small at all," she said. "You're a great big grown-up man, aren't you? Or aren't you?"

"Go on and laugh at me, then," he said.

"I'm not laughing at all. I'm not even smiling, you see. Smiling isn't permitted."

"I wonder why I'm so batty about you?" said Kildare. "Or am I?"

"Not very. Not very batty," she said, shaking her head, and then facing the light again.

KILDARE sighed. "You're a cure, all right. Against taking myself seriously you're a fine cure, old girl. Look here. I want to be serious about something else."

"Yes, doctor," she said.

"About Douglas, and all that."

"Yes, doctor," she said.

"He thinks I'm a bit jealous of him, because I know what a big factor he is in your eyes; he thinks I'm opposing him because of some sort of reason like that. I'll tell you what I did. After I'd given him the introduction to Messenger, I rang Messenger and told him that I was afraid that Douglas wasn't altogether well, and then—"

She broke in, quietly: "That's all between you and Douglas—"

He interrupted in his turn: "You're different from everybody else. I'll never make you out."

"I hope not," she said. "That's what I'm afraid of."

"You can smile, when you say that."

"Thank you, doctor," she said, smiling.

"I mean," said Kildare, "you're going to keep us in two separate compartments of your mind. In this pigeonhole, Douglas. In the other pigeonhole, away over there, Jimmy."

"It's a good way, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do."

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"So I don't need to face the light any more?"

"The fact is that you know I want to be helpful to Douglas."

"But?"

"But I think he's not very well."

"High blood pressure, or something like that?" she asked, carelessly.

"Ah," said Kildare, "you're worried, after all."

"Oh, no!"

"You're worried," he insisted. "That's what I felt when you first came into the room. You think there may be something seriously wrong with him?"

"Isn't there?" she asked.

She put out both her hands in a quick gesture, as she asked the question, as if to prevent the wrong reply, and she kept smiling to invite the happy answer.

He took a note of these things for a moment.

"You've been frightened to death," he announced.

"Not really."

"Yes, frightened almost to death. Why didn't you come to me and ask questions, frankly?"

"I was afraid that you wouldn't be frank in the answers."

"Not frank? With you?"

"Not about Douglas. You wouldn't be frank to me about Douglas."

"Of course I would."

"Don't lie even a little, Jimmy," she said. "I know you pretty well. You wouldn't tell me a word of the truth about Douglas if you thought it were something very serious. What do you think is wrong with him?"

"I don't know."

"You hardly ever know—at first. You're like a hunting dog, and when the first scent of game comes down the wind you're not sure what it may be—a partridge, a grouse, a quail, even. So you have to study for a minute, and wrinkle your forehead, and half-close your eyes, and look inside and out. If I were a patient of yours, I'd be frightened when I saw that look come on your silly face, Jimmy, not what you know—but what do you begin to guess is wrong?"

"That he's burning himself up."

"Overwork?"

"Yes. An obsession that keeps eating him, day and night."

"Obsession," she repeated, tasting the word and not liking it at all. "Go on."

"A fellow like Douglas can live on his nerve strength. Nerves are queer things."

"Nerves," she repeated, as she had done before, but this time with a slight shudder.

He was thinking about Douglas, not about the girl. He was re-seeing the case.

"He's let down, suddenly, by complete fatigue," said the diagnostician, "and then he rallies himself on the strength of his nerves. He forces himself ahead. Nerves are like shock troops. They can't be used all the time, though. And he's using them day and night."

"That doesn't seem horribly serious, does it? To you?" she asked.

"We won't let it be serious," said Kildare, bringing his attention back to her.

"Jimmy, Jimmy," she sighed, "you make me feel horribly better!"

CHAPTER VII

. . . AND NO JIMMY

SHE kept on feeling better, that night and the next day—though in the mid-morning there was a telephone call from Douglas that troubled her just a little.

"Messenger is going to have his experts together this evening, and I'm to see them," he said. "What a fellow that Messenger is! Do you know who will be there? P. J. Willoughby is one of them. You know what a devil *he* is?"

"Of course," said she, though she'd never heard a word about the man.

"Then there's to be Samuel Chrisman. You know—the Harvard man."

"Oh, yes," said Mary, with equal ignorance.

"And Professor Walter O. Nissen."

"Nissen!" she exclaimed, glad to recognize one of the names. "But he's terribly famous and important, isn't he?"

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"Nissen doesn't bother me. He's had plenty of space in the public prints, but that fellow Willoughby is the boy I'm going to watch and talk to. I'm going to aim at him. If I can hit him, the rest are easy."

"You'll have them all on fire. How are you, dear?" she asked.

"A little low, just now. Cold in the head, or something like that. Just the morning lowness, so that the notes I'm making don't seem to run along very well. They tangle up and bog down as if I were back in my freshman year in high school. But they'll straighten out later on."

"Of course they will," said Mary. "I'm off duty at five. May I come over then to your room?"

"I'll be glad to have you. I might rehearse the speech a bit."

"I hope it won't have to be a speech. Won't they simply ask questions?"

His response came quickly with a note of truculence.

"Why *shouldn't* it be a speech?"

"Because that's so exhausting, Douglas. And you ought to save your strength just a little, don't you think?"

"Look here. You've been talking to Jimmy about me."

"Oh, no, Douglas. It's just that he thinks you live on your nerves a trifle too much."

"Now listen to me, my lamb. Jimmy's a good lad, I'm sure. And some day he'll be a fine doctor, according to reports. But just now he's a little young—just a trifle young, eh?"

"Of course he is. And I'm not worried. I don't want you to think that I'm worried, dear. Neither is Jimmy. It's just that he thinks you overdo a trifle, and—"

"Just let that young man keep to his pills and pill boxes in his own world and not bother about me. These confounded little—well, let's not talk about him. I'll see you after five."

"And take care of the cold, dear. You know, there's nothing better than salt and hot water and bicarbonate of soda snuffed up the nose."

"Oh, I know all about that," he chuckled, and rang off.

THAT was the only important event in her day until the afternoon mail brought her a letter in answer to the one she had written to her cousin. It was brief.

It is queer how names pop back into one's mind. But then it isn't surprising that you should think about our poor uncle. Haven't you ever heard his story? I don't know the details, and I'm sure I don't want to. I can look it up if you're really interested in such a black spot in the family record.

When I was a youngster, I remember hearing about his death in that institution. I remember the shudder that went through the family circle. They all stared at one another. I remember how sick and white my mother looked and father ducked his head down and bit his lip, as if he'd been hit in the wind.

I don't think I ever heard them mention his name, after that. When I tried asking questions, they turned the subject. That made me more curious, and I tried to break them down but I didn't have any luck.

It was years later before I heard the story—briefly. It was too horrible for me to want to think of it afterwards. But I can look it up, I suppose. I can even find the date when he first began to go wrong.

But after all, do you really want to know? Hadn't family skeletons of such dimensions best be kept locked up in a dark closet and never shown to the light of day? Outside of him, I think our record is fairly clean.

She picked out the most pungent phrases and pieced them together. *I don't know the details and I'm sure I don't want to. . . . A black spot in the family record. . . . His death in that institution. . . . Too horrible for me to want to think of it. . . . The date when he first began to go wrong. . . . Family skeletons of such dimensions.*

Of it all, one word jumped off the page and remained in her mind: *Institution.*

There was only one kind of institution that she could think of, just then. And she remembered a day, long, long ago, when she had visited an institution for the "restraint and cure" of the mentally unsound.

She got to her room and lay flat on the bed. She could not lie still. The words kept pounding at her. One drop of such a poison is enough to stain the record of a

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whole family, she felt. So, on the point of a pin, a billion fatal germs may be dropped into a city reservoir and there multiply until a whole community becomes diseased.

She got up and sat by the window. The air blew cold on her face but it brought also the mindless uproar of the city which came to her with such a voice that she pulled the window down. The silence inside the room was almost worse than the unhuman noise of the city. She remembered how she had sat there in horror after the first suspicion came into her mind.

"Something pathological about the case," Jimmy had said to Messenger.

Pathological — pathological — pathological; she could remember, now, the first time the word had been seen on a page, to be looked up in the dictionary. Diseased.

And then, only moments ago, Jimmy had been saying: "Obsession," and afterward he had added: "Nerves . . ."

THAT was what he feared about Douglas, of course. A disease of the nerves, that polite word which doctors use when they mean the mind itself.

Had not she herself said over the telephone about a psychopathic case: "Mr. Millan is a little nervous this morning. No, I'm so sorry that the doctor doesn't think it wise that he should be disturbed. . . . Oh, yes. Otherwise he's doing very well. Just as well as could be expected. Please ring again tomorrow."

Poor Mr. Millan, then lying under a restraining sheet, with a straitjacket in the immediate offing as his poor brain crumbled and withered and disintegrated forever!

She wanted to rush to Kildare at once and ask the quick, dreadful question. But she knew she would get no answer. She knew how he would look down, in the quick way he had when he was withdrawing from a conversation. When he looked up again he would have a smooth, easy answer on the tip of his tongue.

They couldn't break through the defenses of Jimmy Kildare. Not even the great Gillespie had the ability to build up a higher wall of bland assurance: not even Gillespie knew so well how to allay fears. Her frightened eyes might as well probe and struggle with a great blank stone as to try to get at his hidden meanings.

He was almost an enemy; she almost hated that calm manner, and that quiet voice which she had heard as he leaned over death-beds, giving even at the very last gasp a certain strange confidence that all would be well, all must be well, although the darkness at that moment was clouding the eyes.

She could get nothing of the truth from Kildare, nothing of the truth that he as yet only suspected. Only a suspicion, but how often was he wrong? How often does the hound truly blooded to foxes turn off on the rabbit's trail?

Should she go to him at once with her discovery that the blood of the Lamonts was in fact tainted? That might help him toward the dreadful truth.

Obsession—nerves; and in the background a Lamont who had died in an "institution"!

She pressed her hands hard across her breast; and it was as if a child were being dragged from her by force. Her arms and her body and her soul were at that moment being emptied of the hope of having children. A starved virginity lay before her; and there would be no Jimmy, no Jimmy Kildare.

The agony was so great that flesh and spirit could not endure it for long. By a natural revulsion, hope possessed her, suddenly. The truth was that Jimmy was not sure; his suspicions did not even take a very definite line. And, even if they did, he was not always, not invariably right.

He could be wrong; he himself would be willing to admit that.

So it might all come out right in the end.

It was possible for her to breathe again, little by little. Then there was the routine of work to return to. By the time she had taken a dozen steps she was a little ashamed of the passion of fear through which she had just passed. And hope, like a swarm of bees, multiplied rapidly.

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CHAPTER VIII

BRING ANOTHER BRAIN

HE lived in one of those hotels which make no pretense to grace or pleasantness. It was simply a concrete box cut across with concrete floors and with windows spotted in regular rows. It gave cheap housing; it had running water and cramped little bathrooms for every client; and it contributed a deathless blight to the spirit. But of course that was the sort of a place Douglas Lamont was sure to choose.

She found him walking up and down his floor with his hands clasped behind his back, his hair tousled, his shirt open at the scrawny throat. His coat had been thrown at a chair and slipped to the floor. Instead of a trim belt, he wore braces that accentuated the hollowness of his chest.

There was a tangle of papers on the table; and she was surprised to see a bottle of bourbon, a siphon, and a tall glass with a bit of muddy amber liquid in the bottom of it. He never had been a drinker, far less a solitary one. To balance the whisky, there was a pot of coffee at the other end of the table, and a cup half filled.

None of these things really mattered to her. The first place she looked was into his eyes, in dread to see there that flickering and uneasy light which she had thought was inspiration but which now, perhaps, might prove to be mere frenzy.

That burning eagerness was no longer in his eyes. Instead, there was a dull and rather blood-shot look. She welcomed that unpleasant change with a great sigh of relief.

"You're all right, Douglas," she said. "You're quite all right, aren't you?"

"All right?" he answered, gloomily. "No, I'm a thousand miles from all right. My head's stuffed up by this infernal cold, or whatever it may be. . . . There's my speech, and it's no good. I can't get the words down. And in a couple of hours I've got to be standing in front of Willoughby, that devil Willoughby, with his baby face and his over-size brain."

She was so relieved that she could not help laughing a little.

"What does Willoughby matter? What does any of it matter?" she asked. "You'll be all right when the time comes. You'll see."

"Will I? Well, perhaps so. But don't stand there laughing. It's the test, for me. Mary, it's the great test and opportunity of my life."

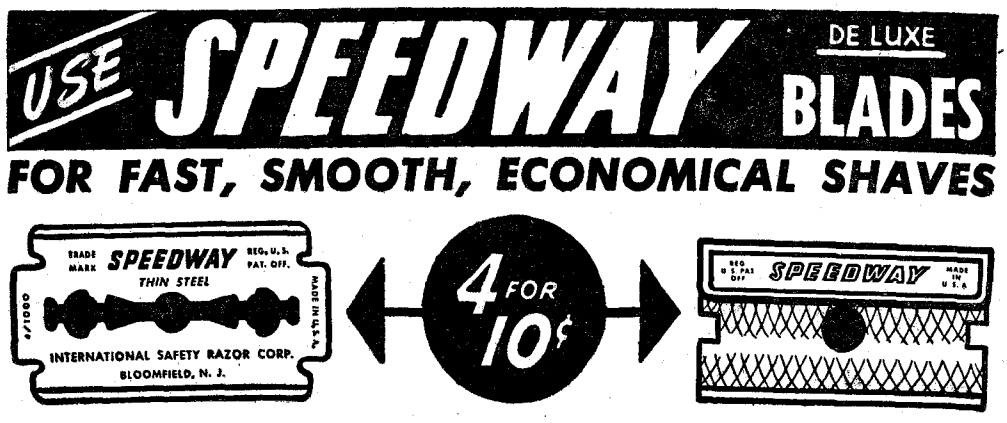
"Of course it is, and you'll go sailing through it. It's all the better not be so—so nervous, Douglas."

"You think so, but you don't know. I'll tell you the truth. I'm two men in one, it seems to me."

She felt the shock of chilly terror again.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, with the whole dreadful panorama of schizophrenia spreading out before her.

"I mean," said Douglas Lamont, "that some days I'm on edge. Everything seems



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easy, then. And other days, I'm rather down, rather sunk. Though I've never been as low as this before."

SHE was laughing again, foolishly. She could have sung; she could have danced. She wished that Kildare could be with her in this room, now, to see what actually was the truth about Douglas. And yet Kildare himself had suggested it. She used his idea now.

"It's because you've been living on your nerves too much, of course," she said. "Why Douglas, everyone has ups and downs. But when you have a good day, you burn yourself up, and then there has to be a reaction. Don't you see? Don't you understand, dear?"

"I've never been this way before," he said. "Not even with a cold in the head and a fever and all that."

"Are you sure you haven't a fever now?" she asked.

"I don't know. I don't think so."

She put her hand against his cheek. It was, in fact, moist and cold. The temperature decidedly was subnormal. She dropped her fingers to his pulse. It was slow, very slow and dragging, with an occasional rapid pulsation that might be due to the alcohol.

"How much of that stuff have you been drinking?" she asked.

"I don't know. The rest of the bottle."

"This afternoon?" she exclaimed.

For a third of the bottle was gone.

"No. I had a drink or two last night. Then this morning another when things started going badly."

"Why Douglas, that's all there is to it. It's just a little more than you're used to, and that's what's slowed you up. Jimmy says the stuff isn't good for anything—except to make a jolly time and break the ice."

"Jimmy's wrong—perhaps not for the first time," drawled Douglas. "I've never worked so well in my life as I have since I started taking a drink or two before I went to bed at night."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"But you hardly touched it, in the old days."

"In the old days I was a sort of dead fish, wasn't I?"

"Not dead at all. But more easy-going."

"I had a chill, one night when I went to bed, and I took a swig to warm me up. As a matter of fact, I slept like a log for five hours and woke up feeling like a new man. A sort of rebirth, if you know what I mean. I couldn't stay in bed. I had to hop up and get to work. There were ideas jumping through my brain so fast that I grabbed a pencil and paper and wrote out a sketch of them. Do you know what they were about?"

"What were they?" she asked, smiling, for this sight of him as a depressed, half-beaten poor devil was more and more of a relief to her. That fire—that crazy fire—was not in him now. As for that relative who died in the "institution"—why, a single case like that makes no difference. There's bound to be one in every old family, is there not?

"What were the notes about, Douglas?"

"They were the first sketch of the project!"

"Really—in your mind while you were asleep?"

"Oh, I'd been thinking up that street for a good many years, of course. Every economist does. Every economist dreams about solving the great question and apportioning a new sort of life and happiness to the underdogs. And that's the way solutions come, you see. You ponder over the problem for a long time. Then suddenly the truth shines in your eyes—the true way out."

He sloshed some whisky into the glass, fed it a squirt from the siphon, and took a swallow. Then he shook his head.

"It doesn't seem to do any good," he said.

"Give me the bottle, Jimmy. Don't touch it again."

"I tell you, it *can* help me, Mary. I hate the taste of the rotten stuff, but I never drink enough of it to get befogged. It's only that it gives me an up."

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"Take a hot bath and then lie down," she commanded.

"Lie down? When I've got this stuff to work out?"

"Yes. A bath to relax you. And then lie down. In an hour, you'll be yourself again. And don't touch the whisky again."

"Perhaps," said he.

BUT now he sank down in the chair at the table and rested his chin on his fist. He seemed to her woefully small. Once more there came over her a swift pity for those men who work at the problems of the world, unregarded and forgotten, giving out life and blood as if it were bread.

"If you have an idea," she said, "go ahead and take notes on it. I'll sit here. I don't bother you, Douglas, do I?"

"No. I've got to get something down."

He picked up a pencil, scowled at the distance as he poised his hand over the manila tablet, and prepared to write. A word or two went down on the paper. Again he lifted his head and stared into nothingness.

From where she sat, angling toward the window in the straight, uncomfortable chair, she could see him in three-quarters profile. And what she noted still was the dullness of the eye. No matter how he frowned with effort, the flash did not come back to him.

He was worked out, of course. She remembered feeling and looking like that when she had been up night after night studying for examinations. The time comes, of course, when there is not a single response to the will. The body fails; the will alone remains fixed and firm. So it was with her brother.

He shook his head and set his teeth. More words went down on the paper. And again there was the pause.

She got up and stood behind his chair, saying softly: "There's only an hour and a half for you to get ready. Do as I say, my dear. Lie down. Close your eyes. I'll read you to sleep the way I used to a long time ago. You remember?"

"Sleep?" said his dull voice. "I'm asleep now! There's no brain that will work for me."

"Because you're tired out, Douglas. And you've *got* to be a little fresher for that interview. You really must do what I say. You know, I've learned a bit about how to take care of people."

"It's Willoughby," he muttered. "If I could get by Willoughby, I'd be all right. If it weren't for that baby face, and the brain I know that goes behind it. . . ."

Even then, in the tension, he had to yawn suddenly. And the sound was music to her. If ever there were normality, it was what she was seeing before her.

And yet it was a day of immense importance to him, she was perfectly aware. If he failed now, he might never be the same man again. That was one of the great Gillespie's ideas—that men may become punch-drunk in the ordinary struggles of life, just as pugilists become punch-drunk in the ring after many beatings. A man who has failed once too often may never find in himself, in the future, the sufficient fire and focal point. He remains inept, helpless, living on hope and not on accomplishment.

So a new sort of fear came to her; but compared with the horror that had been in her, by fits and starts for two whole days, this fear was nothing. It did not poison her own future, for one thing.

"I'm going out," she said.

"No. Don't go. I'd rather have you here," he said.

Still with his gaze fixed on the blankness of the wall, he made a gesture toward her, and she loved him for even that small appeal.

"I have to get something, and then I'll come right back," she said.

"Don't bother getting things for me," he said, as she went out the door. "I don't need things; I need another brain."

His voice was quite toneless; it was without life.

She closed the door and went hastily to the elevator. When she reached the street she went into a booth in a drugstore and telephoned to Kildare at the hospital.

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CHAPTER IX

MIST IN THE NIGHT

THE quiet voice of Kildare presently was saying: "I'm too busy to leave the hospital. Unless it's terribly important."

"It's terribly important," she answered. "Douglas is really bogged down. The poor fellow is worn out, just as you said he was likely to be. You're so right about him, Jimmy. He's burning himself up. And now that the nerve energy is gone, there's nothing to sustain him.

"In an hour and a half, he'll have to appear before Messenger and the experts, particularly a clever brain named Willoughby. Somehow he can't get himself started. The mind won't work."

"Won't work?" repeated Kildare, quickly.

"That's it. You know how it is when you're dead fagged? You can't think."

"Yes. I suppose so," said Kildare.

"If you could come over and give him some sort of a sedative, or whatever it is that he needs. If he simply can stop worrying, I'm sure that he'll pull himself together. He *has* to be right when he faces those four men."

"I'll be there in a moment," answered Kildare, and hung up.

He was with them, in fact, five minutes after she had returned to Douglas, to find him once more pacing the floor.

"I've asked Jimmy to come over," she said.

She expected a violent reaction; but Douglas simply shook his head. "Even if Jimmy were a *bad* doctor," he said, "I'd be glad to see him. Something ought to be done."

When Kildare came in, he shook him quite warmly by the hand.

"It's kind of you to come over, like this," he said. "I've been excited and rude, talking to you before, Jimmy. You know, it seems to me that it wasn't I, but another man. It seems to me," he added, "that I must have been crazy to think that any idea of mine was so important that the whole world ought to know about it."

Kildare, watching him, said: "That's all right. There's nothing hurt, nothing broken at all. I'm sorry that you're upset."

"It's Willoughby," said Douglas. "There's an economist with a brain as sure as a tiger's spring. If I slip—if I wave my arms and get too enthusiastic—that fellow will be the death of my project. And I don't seem to be able to pull myself together."

He slumped into a chair and leaned back against the wall, shaking his head, his eyes half closed. Other words, half-born and unuttered, trembled on his lips. And in the corner of his mouth, as if he had gnawed his lip to the blood, there was a little fleck of red-stained saliva.

THE reddened eyes, the loosened face-muscles, and above all that stain of red in the corner of the mouth began to have clear meaning to Kildare. His mind picked up the first surmise that had come to him when he first saw Douglas. It began to rush forward toward a conclusion.

He saw Mary, from the side, watching him with a confident smile.

"It's just exhaustion, isn't it, Jimmy?"

"Yes. Exhaustion. Of course," said Kildare.

"Then don't be so grim about it."

He passed a hand up across his face and back over his head.

Sometimes the whole profession of medicine was abhorrent to him. Sometimes it seemed to Kildare that—body, mind, and spirit—man is a hopeless case of decadence and of real decay with no soundness at the core. He felt these things now, and more sharply than he ever had felt them before, as he stared at Mary's brother with a growing conviction.

The girl was saying, cheerfully: "You know, Douglas has been slipping into some bad habits. He never had this nervousness until a few years ago. Then he started having a drink or two before he went to bed. And he began to wake up with his head full of new ideas—like the project, for instance."

"Ah! He woke up with a head full of new ideas?" repeated Kildare.

"That's all right, isn't it?"

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"Of course it's all right," said Kildare. "I'll be back in a minute."

When he had gone out, she said to Douglas: "It's all right. He knows what's wrong."

"Does he?" asked Lamont, dully. "He doesn't talk a great deal, does he?"

"Not when he sees the truth about a case. He doesn't talk. He just does something about it. He'll be back and fix you up so that you'll be a new man. You'll drive through Willoughby like a dream."

Kildare came back and started to prepare to give an injection. Lamont obediently rolled up his sleeve.

"I like to know why things like this are done," he said. "You'd better tell me, Jimmy. Just what do you think is wrong with me? I might have an attack of these blue devils some other time when you're not around."

"It's nervous exhaustion," said Kildare. "It comes from making efforts that are a little too big for your skin to hold. You see?"

"I see," said Lamont, yawning.

MARY, glancing from one to the other, kept her eyes still on Kildare, even when the needle went into the scrawny arm of her brother. For she knew that Kildare was lying.

She could not have attributed her knowledge to anything other than a special instinct or perception which she sometimes possessed when she was with him—or was there not a slight arching of the brows, a slight brightening of the eyes, as if he were making a slight, a very slight extra effort in the direction of extreme candor?

Perhaps he overdid the frankness a little bit. It is a fault, she knew, which grows on doctors. The bedside manner may become a sort of conversational poison.

The injection completed, Douglas was rolling down his sleeve again.

He was relaxed now.

"Now you lie down, close your eyes, and relax," said Kildare.

Douglas obeyed. He threw his arms out wide as if sleep were an embrace he waited for.

"You'll feel a bit of warmth," said Kildare. "Then sleepiness. Don't fight against it."

"As long as I'm right for the Messenger party," said Douglas, yawning. "That's all that mat ers."

He sig ied deeply.

"Don t think forward to anything. Just try to relax," said Kildare.

He picked up Douglas' coat and pulled it over the middle of his body. Then he sat down and took the pulse. Counting it, he looked up with the unseeing eyes of thought that dwelt vaguely on Mary and then shifted away.

She was a little troubled by that shifting away from her, as if she might be able to probe into a secret. Some of her sense of security began to leave her; and yet there remained a great warmth about her heart as she saw the two of them side by side.

Kildare rose from the bedside, presently, as the breathing of Douglas became regular, deep.

He went to the telephone and asked, quietly, for a number. Douglas did not stir. He was soundly asleep.

"He'll be awake in time for the meeting?" asked Mary.

Kildare stared back at her with the same empty, thoughtful eyes.

Presently he was saying: "This is Kildare. May I speak to Mr. Messenger?"

He paused. Mary Lamont stood up and went hurriedly to him. She stood behind his chair, full of question, but too much the trained nurse to interrupt.

After a moment Kildare was saying: "Hello, Mr. Messenger. I'm sorry to tell you that Douglas Lamont is all out of sorts tonight. A cold coming on. And he's been overworking. The fact is that I've put him to bed . . .

"Yes, I know about the meeting, but I felt that it was more important to make sure of his health. Can you possibly postpone it to another time? . . . That's kind of you. Yes, he *is* impressive. But tonight he wouldn't be able to do himself justice. . . . Of course I will. Goodbye."

He hung up the telephone.

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"JIMMY!" whispered Mary Lamont. "You haven't knocked him out, have you? He'll be almost insane if he wakes up and finds out that he wasn't at the meeting."

Kildare shrugged his shoulders. He took out a card and scribbled a prescription on the back of it.

"You can step out and have this prescription filled," said Kildare. "He'll sleep quietly until you're back."

"Yes," she said, with the old fear coming back in her a little. "Jimmy, what is it?"

"Why, you can see for yourself," he said. "He's exhausted. He couldn't make good sense. He couldn't drive his point home, if he went to see Messenger and those experts tonight. Messenger will call another meeting—perhaps for tomorrow night."

"Then there's nothing lost?" she asked.

"Why, of course not. But a great deal gained, I hope."

"It isn't something *more* than exhaustion?" she insisted.

"Why? What makes you think it might be?"

"Because you've grown horribly distant, all at once. There's a thousand miles between us, Jimmy."

"We'll go out together," said Kildare. "You're a little dizzy with concern, because it's Douglas. Try to think that it's simply anybody—a casual case in the hospital. That's what you'll have to do."

She kept silent on the way down in the elevator. They came out onto the sidewalk and found a thin mist of rain falling that brightened the sidewalks to silver under the street lamps, to glowing orange near the neon signs.

Kildare, in the open, paused and lifted his head as if he were looking up to a clean, starry sky, filling his lungs with pure air. She took note of that, also. He had been through some sort of an ordeal.

Then he said, in his most casual manner: "You'd better stay with him through the night. I suppose you can sleep in the big chair, Mary? I'd stay, but I have to push through the report for Gillespie."

"Of course I'll stay," she answered. "It's as serious as that?"

"I don't want him to be alone when he wakes up. You know—he'll see what the time is and realize that he's missed the Messenger meeting. That would be a horrible shock, wouldn't it?"

"Of course."

"I think he'll sleep through the night. Just get that prescription filled and when he *does* begin to wake up, telephone to me. I'll come right over. I want to see what the reactions are after he's slept."

"How long before he wakes up?"

"I think he'll carry through the night, but I'm not sure."

"And—Jimmy, it's all right?"

"Of course it's all right," said Kildare, and then turned away from her and walked off, always hurrying, always vainly trying to overtake the crowd of duties that lay ahead.

She watched him out of sight around the corner; and a voice inside her kept saying, *But he's lying. It isn't all right.*

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own control of the largest circulating newspaper in my County and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 139, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 139, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

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Oomph Cop

By LESLIE T. WHITE
Author of "Roman Holiday", "Semper Paratus", etc.

Personal history of a young Irishman who rose in the police force by way of the headlines—until the whole story was printed

With a coolness that amazed him Matt calculated his shots

MATT SHEEDY was old Iron Mike Dougal's son-in-law, for all the good that did him. Captain Dougal skippered the headquarters' homicide detail, a man-killing job, and that's no pun. Matt was just an ordinary patrolman pounding an all-night beat down at Harbor precinct, and their paths never crossed.

Matt and Alice— Sweet Alice, he called her—had a two-room flat over Steinbloch's Delicatessen. In their thirteen months of marriage, Iron Mike had visited them twice. Christmas and Thanksgiving.

There had been no hard feelings. It was just the Old Man's way. As one of the detectives said, aptly enough, Iron Mike only called on two kinds of people; murdered and murderer, that's all. Matt Sheedy didn't care, and Alice was so much in love with her husband, she didn't mind either.

Alice had hungered a lot for visible affection since her mother had died ten years before, and while Iron Mike would have willingly given his life for Alice, to save his life he couldn't unbend enough to demonstrate his love. But Matt was Irish, and love-making was as natural as breathing to him.

So that's how it stood until that sticky August night when Matt walked into the Dock saloon and killed Jake Lugi and Pinky Bock. That gave him his first taste of publicity, and shortly thereafter he felt the pangs of ambition.

There was nothing about Matt Sheedy to distinguish him from any of the other four thousand odd cops on the department. Just a tall, raw-boned, red-headed fellow such as you see tramping a beat in any big city. His features were on the large side, but a twisted smile saved his face.

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Contrary to the newspaper buildup, Matt had not entered the saloon on the tip that Lugi and Bock—cop-killers, bank-robbers and Public Enemies one and two—were inside. He had sneaked in because he wanted a glass of cold beer. He hadn't seen the precious pair until Lugi, jittery from weeks in hiding, pulled his gun at the sight of brass buttons against a blue serge background.

Nor was Matt the "cool, fearless hero" described in the press. He nearly died of fright when Lugi's first shot splintered the bar mirror and cleared the saloon, leaving him frozen against the mahogany, pitifully alone. What Matt did then was largely automatic, although he deserved plenty of credit for accurate shooting. Any one of the five slugs he planted, two in Bock and three in Lugi, would have sufficed, and the neat, black-rimmed hole in Lugi's forehead was a particularly convincing touch.

He had never killed before, and the sight of his handiwork left him a little nauseated, but he found comfort in the terse compliments of the two hard boiled radio patrolmen who were the first to arrive. Then one of them made a routine call to the Central office homicide squad.

So Iron Mike and his son-in-law finally crossed trails.

NOT one of the crowd jammed in every door and window of the saloon saw Captain Dougal exhibit the slightest sign that he had ever so much as seen Matt Sheedy before. Iron Mike stalked into the place at the head of his squad, his head slightly bent and his big shoulders stooped. He went directly to the dead hoodlums and made a cursory examination, then he left the details to his identification expert, and turned to one of the radio cops.

"Who knocked them over?"

The radio cop pointed. "Young Sheedy. He had 'em on ice when we got here."

Matt was grinning slightly, his back resting against the bar. He was beginning to enjoy himself, and he figured the Old Man would be mighty proud of his son-in-law. But if Iron Mike was bursting with pride, he gave no evidence of the fact.

He did say, "You didn't waste any lead," but he said it the way you might comment on someone bursting pipes in a shooting gallery.

Matt felt a little foolish, but it didn't last long. At breakfast he told an adoring Alice.

"Well, old Frozen-face got the surprise of his life when he walked in and saw me on the job," he chuckled. "But I must say your pa sticks to business."

"I'll bet he was proud of you, though," said Sweet Alice.

Matt crawled into bed, and when he woke up in the middle of the afternoon, he found himself momentarily famous. Lugi and Bock had been badly wanted by law enforcement agencies from the F. B. I. to village constables. And if Captain Dougal had been sparing with his praise, the newspapers were not. They portrayed Matt Sheedy as a cool, fearless hero who carried the memory of martyred comrades in his mind when he went alone into the waterfront dive to fight a death duel with the two desperadoes.

Two days later the police commissioner horned in on the publicity by promoting the hero to the Central Office homicide detail where, as the commissioner blatantly phrased it, "Sheedy can use his excellent markmanship to rid this city of a few more murderers." And then some reporter suddenly recalled that Matt Sheedy was Iron Mike's son-in-law. That smeared the story over the front page. Father-and-son stuff.

Matt got a great bang out of the stories, and he was pretty well pleased with himself and the world in general when he reported in plainclothes for work on the homicide squad.

He found Captain Dougal hunched behind a battered old oaken desk. The skipper waved him into a chair, and dourly contemplated his own gnarled hands. And anxious as he was for the Old Man to break the strained silence, Matt was conscious of the character of this shabby little office.

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In a lot of ways it was like Iron Mike himself. Severe, stripped of all superfluities and scarred by rough usage, it seemed permeated with all the dramas enacted within those four bare walls. A small barred window looked down on a patrol alley where three squad cars were bunched for emergencies. Elsewhere in the building a metal door clanged; from somewhere the muffled sobs of a woman filtered through. Slowly Matt's jauntiness seeped away.

"Sheedy, this is the trickiest, toughest detail on the department," the skipper said finally. "It's the best, because I usually pick my own men. Seasoned, experienced men. You were handed to me. I don't like it."

Matt was taken back. "I didn't know you felt like that," he said. "What have you got against me?"

A siren wailed as a squad car rolled out of the alley below. The skipper's chair creaked wearily as he leaned back before answering. The faint odor of a gun-cleaner passed in through the window.

"You've pounded a beat slightly less than a year and a half," the veteran growled. "That's just about long enough to teach you the difference between a club and a gun. Then you stumbled onto a couple of trapped rats and killed them. That was a good piece of routine duty. But is there anything in that record that entitles you to think you're detective?"

That's a swell way for a father-in-law to act, Sheedy thought, and he felt his face grow red. "I got a right to a fair trail, like anybody else on the force."

"You'll get it—a trail. But you have to hold up your end; my boys can't carry you. Report out to the squadroom."

MATT went out to the squadroom, a dingy place with a dozen small desks and stiff, uncomfortable chairs to match. Of the half-dozen men in the room, he recognized four; Sergeant Martel, who had lost a hand in a knife fight with a marihuana smoker, was playing rummy with Leverock and Stuart, the pair who had cleaned up the Dolly Graves murder. Hopkins, another veteran, was asleep tilted in a chair against the wall.

Two other detectives were questioning a woman. The card players glanced up and nodded when Matt came in. He found a chair near the window and picked up a newspaper.

After an hour of this, Matt began to chafe with resentment. He assured himself these other men were jealous; it had taken most of them from ten to fifteen years to make this squad that he had made in almost as many months. Well, all Matt wanted was a chance.

He got it right after lunch. The skipper told him to locate a witness named Jason V. Hepple, and gave Matt the man's last-known address.

This wasn't "using his excellent marksmanship to rid the city of a few more murderers," but Matt was pleased to be doing something. So he hopped out to the address given him, and questioned the new tenants. He talked to the neighbors; he tried to locate friends of the missing witness. He questioned the mailman; he tried the telephone book. After two days, he walked into Captain Dougal's office and announced that Jason V. Hepple was not in the city.

Without comment, the Old Man picked up the telephone and called the Gas and Electric Company. He inquired if Hepple was still a subscriber. He was. It took Iron Mike less than three minutes to accomplish what Matt had failed to achieve in two days.

Matt got the idea that Iron Mike was riding him.

The jobs given him confirmed his suspicions. No menial task escaped him; every petty assignment was dropped on his desk.

He crabbed about it to Alice. "I guess the Old Man figures I'm not good enough to be his son-in-law," he grumbled. "Or maybe he doesn't want to split up the glory among the family."

Naturally Alice was hurt by this change in Matt, and she defended her father. "But, darling, Papa isn't like that. You

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ask any of the men who work with him. Why he's absolutely fair, almost too fair. And after all, Matt dear, you *haven't* had much experience . . ."

When Alice pulled that one, Matt slammed out of the flat. Since the beginning of his success had been in a saloon, he hunted up another convivial spot near headquarters, which was frequented by criminal lawyers and newspapermen.

There he found compatability and the sympathy for which he yearned. There he met a girl called Chips—a goodlooking brunette in her twenties, a reporter on one of the more sensational dailies—who was particularly appreciative of Matt's Irish wit, and who also found him an excellent pipeline into the confidential activities of the homicide detail.

About the latter, Martel warned him. "Watch those newspaper dames," he suggested. "They'd cross up their own mother for a headline."

"I'm used to being crossed up," Matt said, and walked away.

With increasing frequency, he took out his resentment on Alice. She, in turn, was bewildered by the change in her husband, and was mutely terrified that he was drifting away from her. Matt became convinced that she had aligned herself on the side of Iron Mike, so he felt justified in spending more of his off-time away from home. Most of it with Chips.

He wasn't in love with Chips, nor she with him. But she gave him something he didn't get at home—admiration. And she cannily kept alive Matt's conviction that Iron Mike was trying to break him out of jealousy. Whether over the job, or over Sweet Alice, they couldn't decide.

During his working hours, however, Matt had flashes of logic that made him wonder. All the other detectives, not alone those on the homicide detail, and even the criminal lawyers, respected Captain Dougal, even if they couldn't *like* him personally. He was the sort of man men liked to work with, for he asked no man to do something he himself would not do, or could not do. Matt began to feel a grudging admiration of the old Man. He worked hard, if only to prove that Iron Mike's measurement of him was wrong.

He might have made it if he had not gone to the Troubador that Saturday night with Chips.

THE Troubador was a third-rate night spot with a fast-moving floor-show. Matt wasn't having a particularly good time; he was a little disgusted with Chips, and wished that he was back in the flat with Sweet Alice. So he was in a surly mood when the three bandits walked in and stuck up the joint.

Matt sat glumly at his table, watching the three punks brandish their guns. It wasn't like the night he shot it out with Lugi and Bock; he wasn't trapped this time. He was just contemptuous and a little drunk. He suddenly pulled the table over for a shield, drew his gun, and lying on the floor with his elbow propped up, he killed two of the gunmen and brought down the third near the door.

This time he put in his own call to headquarters. "This is Sheedy," he told Iron Mike over the phone. "I just picked off a couple of stick up men. What do you want done?"

With Chips an eye-witness, the papers gave Matt a great write-up.

He was a hero again.

Sweet Alice was a little weary of having a hero around the house, so she left him. She had a long talk, her first real talk with her father.

"Matt thinks you're riding him, Papa. He's obsessed with the idea. What *is* wrong? We were so happy before!"

It took Mike Dougal a long time to get words coming.

"Matt's a fine lad, baby, a fine lad. But making a good cop is something like making a fine building. You got to lay the foundation before you can build the upper stories. Matt would have builded into a regular sky-scraper, if he hadn't tried to start with the roof first."

"I know, Papa, but Matt can't see that. Why don't you talk to him?"

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Iron Mike squirmed. "A man's got to find those things out for himself, baby. If I tell him, he won't believe me because he can't see it yet." He picked up the morning paper with Matt's picture squarely on the front page. "An' those stories don't help him to see."

Captain Dougal had not meant to speak to Matt about his personal business, but as Alice slowly left his office, he suffered the acute agony of a man who has no release for his emotions. So after an hour or two of brooding, he sent for Matt Sheedy, and closed the door.

"You figure I'm riding you, Sheedy?" he asked bluntly.

Matt nodded. "Sure I do. You treat me like an office boy. Yet when something comes up, like last night, I prove I can deliver."

Iron Mike made a pyramid with his fingers. "You have confused guts with courage. Nobody doubts your guts with a gun, kid. But it takes courage to plug along, getting experience, testing your judgment, learning your job in the right way."

Matt got up. "I get what you're driving at," he said. "You got the old-fashioned idea that a guy has to tramp a beat for fifteen years before he's good enough for this crew. Well, I won my right to this squad, and you can't squeeze me out of it." And he walked out.

Iron Mike had dinner with Alice that night.

"I talked to Matt," he reported.

Her eyes lighted. "And . . .?"

He shrugged. "He's got the bit in his teeth. We'll just have to let him run with it."

MATT didn't get over his second lucky break. He wearied of the routine and leg work of the detail; he wanted movement and action. Occasionally the skipper assigned him to work with Sergeant Martel, or one of the other veterans, but always in a secondary capacity.

The men were friendly enough, but Matt sensed it was more tolerance than respect. He determined to show them if he ever got the chance. That chance became his Holy Grail.

He didn't go home to the flat at all anymore. He lived uptown in a bachelor apartment and that's where he was sleeping the night Chips telephoned. She had to see him right away she said, so he went over to her place. She was white with excitement and tension when she let him in.

"Matt, I got something hot, so hot it burns!" she blurted. "Matt, Roger Butler's eight-year-old kid has been kidnapped! Butler, the oil promoter!"

Matt whistled softly. "Does the skipper know about it?"

"Sure he knows. You wouldn't expect him to tell *you* about it, would you?"

"I guess not," Matt said.

Chips laughed. "Well, here's the setup. The F.B.I. got the kidnap story first, but Mike Dougal was called by someone because a Butler servant was shot in the actual snatch. So the Feds and the police are working together for once."

"How'd you find out?" Matt asked. He knew how wary was the F.B.I. about giving out news, and Iron Mike was the same.

Chips smiled enigmatically. "I get around," she countered. "But here's where you come in. I know that the kidnappers have made their demand and old Butler has made the F.B.I. and the cops promise to make no move until the ransom's paid. Well, my paper has a tip on where the youngster's being held. You and I can crack this case together, Matt. I'll have it in headlines before any other sheet in town even knows there is a snatch, and you'll be famous!"

Matt rumpled his reddish hair and scowled. He knew that he should, technically, report to Captain Dougal, but if he did pass it over to Iron Mike, the skipper would probably relegate him to the background.

"You're not worrying about Mike?" Chips baited him. "We'll give him a break in the story by saying he put you on the case; he'll be darned glad to take the

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credit for that much after the way he's kicked you around."

Matt licked his lips. "You're sure of your information, Chips?"

"Look, fella, I'm doing *you* the favor," she snapped.

"Okay, okay," he said. "Let's get rolling."

The house was small and dark, and set well back from the shaded side street. Matt stood with Chips and a musty little newsphotographer in a puddle of darkness, looking at it.

"Our informer tells us there's only one man in the house guarding the Butler kid," Chips explained. "After what you've been through, you certainly should be able to handle him."

Her voice had the ingratiating note some people use in spurring children to noble deeds. Matt caught it, and suddenly he did not wholly trust her. But he brushed the feeling aside. This was his one chance to force Iron Mike to recognize him as a resourceful officer in his own right. That objective blinded all reason. When he rescued the kidnapped youngster, he would tell all the reporters that Captain Dougal had personally assigned him to the job. Iron Mike would not dare deny it.

Matt unholstered his gun and slipped it into a convenient pocket of his coat. "You two stay here," he warned, and merged into the darkness.

He circled the little house, approaching it from the rear.

THE shades were tightly drawn, but, as Matt watched, he could see the pencil lines of light that marked the windows. He felt the hair tingle along the back of his neck. The opaque darkness around him seemed to harbor men.

He put this down as the imaginings of fear, and walked swiftly across the yard to the rear door. The door was locked, but after listening a moment to satisfy himself there was no one standing just inside, he eased it open with a master key.

There is an indescribable sensation to stepping into the total darkness of a strange house, peopled with the unknown. As a patrolman, Matt had gone into buildings after criminals, but somehow this was different.

He pawed the gun out of his pocket. The cool, checkered butt steadied his confidence, and he felt his way slowly forward like a blind man.

Then he heard the soft whimper of the child.

Any doubts Matt Sheedy might have felt were swept away by that faint call of distress. He knew now that he was right; that regardless of the source of his information, regardless of his own selfish purpose in being here alone, he had at last located the kidnapped youngster.

He moved straight ahead, as though the presence of the child was in itself an armor that made him impregnable. He was halfway down a hallway, when a door opened suddenly and a wide rectangle of light splashed full on him. Framed in the doorway was a man.

Matt was the first to recover from the surprise, so he was moving obliquely when the other man swung up his gun. He felt the impact, rather than pain, as his right leg jerked out from under him and threw him against the wall. He leaned there, propped up by his left shoulder, and fired twice. He waited until the man pitched forward, then he hobbled to the stairway at the end of the hall.

Up above he heard voices; and footsteps drummed along the floors. But over all that noise, he heard the child cry again, and he guided his course that way with a stubborn singleness of purpose that he was not aware he possessed.

When he tried to climb erect, he found his leg was numbed, so he crawled up on all fours, like a dog. There were two men at the head of the stairs, and when less than halfway up, Matt realized he couldn't go much farther into their gunfire. He stopped and lay flat.

With a coolness that amazed him he calculated his shots. He had three left. He spent one now, and a man tumbled down the stairs and rolled past him. The other

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man ran back along the hallway and ducked into a room.

Matt inched up the rest of the distance and hauled himself erect on the balustrade. Loss of blood gave him an exalted giddiness, and he reeled across the corridor towards a closed door. As he grabbed the knob, a harsh voice screamed:

"Don't open that door, or I'll—"

The end of the threat was lost in noise on the floor below. Matt heard men running, then the quick stutter of gunfire.

He sat down on the floor facing the door, and with his good leg kicked it open. There was a big guy standing across the room, with a black automatic. Matt saw every detail. The big man was holding a curly-headed girl in one arm, like a shield. But the mobster was expecting the erect figure of a man to walk through that door, and it took him an instant to re-focus his attention to Matt, sitting there in the opening.

Matt shot his legs from under him, and as the gunman crashed to the floor, Matt scrambled into the room and hauled the screaming child to the safety of his own arms.

He heard men pounding up the stairs. It was too late now to close the door, so he pushed the child behind his own huge body and turned his face to the doorway, as a big man charged into the room.

He was too far gone to recognize anyone in that smoky half-light, but when the newcomer shouted, "Sheedy!" Matt dropped his gun arm around the child's shoulder and whispered, "It's Iron Mike, honey!" as if he wanted the youngster to know everything was all right. Then he fell on his face, dragging the child down with him.

That was the picture the papers carried —Matt Sheedy, wounded and bloody, shielding the terrified Butler child with his own massive body. Matt Sheedy, hero! The musty little cameraman had been right behind Iron Mike when the cops raided the house. What his camera couldn't tell, Chips and the other reporters filled in. The story made history.

TEN days later Matt opened his eyes in the hospital room and discovered he was famous. Now that he was permitted visitors, it seemed that everybody in the city was there to congratulate him and tell him what a swell cop he was.

To top it all, the police commissioner himself breezed in, heeled by a couple of photographers. The commissioner acted mighty pleased, and he told Matt to hurry up and get on his feet because there would be a nice berth waiting for him at headquarters—a pretty big berth, too.

That made Matt a trifle uneasy. Too much conflict with Iron Mike might be painful. So he asked casually about Iron Mike. The commissioner laughed shortly. "Don't worry about him," he said. "We've got him where he won't pull any more fancy plays." He rose and started for the door. "Hurry up and get well, Sheedy. We need you on the job."

It took Matt nearly two days to get the real story of what had happened the night he was shot, and after. He learned that Iron Mike Dougal and two of his crew had been keeping the kidnap house under surveillance for several days, at the request of the F. B. I.

It had not been known definitely that the missing child was held there and the Federal officers had specifically instructed the police to make no overt move, as they had guaranteed both the distraught parents and the kidnappers that no action would be taken until the child had been safely returned to her home. What even Iron Mike had not known as that the F. B. I. had a special agent working undercover as a member of the mob.

Iron Mike had recognized Sheedy blundering into the little white house, but not soon enough to stop him. So when the shooting started, there had been only one thing left to do. Iron Mike had led his boys on the raid. In getting into the hideaway, the police had seriously wounded the government undercover agent.

When the story broke in all the papers that Sheedy had been acting under the personal orders of Captain Dougal, the gov-

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ernment brought pressure to bear in the right places. Iron Mike was charged with doublecrossing the Federal officers and held responsible for the wounding of their agent. Even Roger Butler joined in accusing the police of grandstanding and needlessly endangering the life of his child.

For the press it was a great opportunity; in full cry, the papers rode the police department hard.

To all this, Iron Mike kept silent. So they broke him, quietly and thoroughly, and he went back into harness to pound a dreary suburban beat as a common patrolman. He took it the way he took everything else,—in his stride. Matt heard that Sweet Alice took her father a warm lunch at three o'clock every morning just like she'd done for him when he used to work the graveyard shift out where there were no restaurants. Iron Mike was broken, all right.

WHEN Matt finally got the truth pieced together, bitterness washed over him, and shame. Matt Sheedy, the hero. Matt Sheedy, the grandstander. Matt Sheedy, the fake. His arrogance left him. He was humble, and afraid for what he had done to Iron Mike.

There was just one course left for a man like Matt.

The commissioner was astounded to see Sheedy come marching into his office, and more astounded when he had heard him out.

For Sheedy told his story, not sparing himself in any details.

"Well, this certainly sheds a new light on the Butler case, Sheedy," he said finally, "and I'll reinstate Captain Dougal at once. But I can't understand why he didn't come right out and frankly explain about your blundering into the hideout without his knowledge."

"I'm beginning to understand things like that, sir," Matt said. "Captain Dougal backs up his men, right or wrong."

The official looked shrewdly at Matt. "I suppose you know, Sheedy, that despite your personal valor in this affair, you will have to be disciplined?"

Matt reddened. "Yes, sir. If you don't mind, sir, I'd like to serve on the same beat the skipper has now, until I know enough to get on the homicide squad again. And I'd like to go over tonight and break the news to him myself."

The commissioner shrugged. "I could give you a better post than that," he said, "but it's okay if you want it that way. Tell Dougal the good news yourself, and report for duty tomorrow night."

Matt dug out his old blue uniform and took it down to the tailor near headquarters to be pressed. Then, about quarter of three, he took his station on a quiet suburban street corner. He wasn't quite sure which way she'd come, but the call box where she met Iron Mike was on that corner, so he'd hang around a while.

Suddenly he heard the sharp click of high heels on the pavement, and his heart began to pound. He couldn't move. He just stood there under the street light and waited for her to recognize him. She gave a little gasp. "Matt! What are you doing here!" He looked at her for a moment, drinking in the wonder of her, the wonder that he'd lost.

All at once she was in his arms, pressed hard against him. The lunchbox lay forgotten on the ground, and he was saying broken words that didn't make sense. But somehow Alice understood, and when she raised her face to his, it was wet with tears.

"Oh, my darling, it's been so long, so terribly long."

"Alice," he said, "I've been such a fool. Stupid and blind. But tonight I'm starting again—if you'll let me. I'm going to take over Iron Mike's beat, and he's going back to his old job. Maybe, some day, I'll know enough to work for him again. And maybe, someday, I can make you love me again."

And that's the way Iron Mike found them when he came around to ring in: A cop and his girl, sitting side by side on the curbstone, with not even the lunchbox between them.

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The Behemoth glowered and made ready to slice Mr. Weeble's quivering whiskers

Weeble Coming Round the Mountain

By FOSTER-HARRIS

Author of "Ready, Weeble and Willing," "Rough Justice," etc.

The hilarious parable of the mountain and the mouse with the two-gun mustache

WITH a sudden song in his soul, little Mr. Wallace Weeble pricked up his blood-red whiskers and whistled to his weary feet. For there, at last, was the town. There is was, Okie, the coming oil capital of the West—or so Lou Brouer's enthusiastic letter had described it.

But for four footsore hours now, coming round that mountain, Mr. Weeble had been dead certain it must be going instead, just plain outrunning him.

But no, there she was, and down there, maybe . . . maybe . . . was a job. An optimist that way, ever since he'd been dropped on his head as a baby, Mr. Weeble had long looked for a nice, safe job. Ever

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since his nice, safe job next to the safe in the little Indiana bank had folded.

As a symbol of desperation or something, he had let that red mustache run wild, and it had; taking him along, of course. So here he was in the wildest, woolliest part of the oil country, looking for peace in a boom!

Beaming happily through his thick-lensed spectacles, he hurried on down the slope, and as ever where that bright, Viking nose-muff led, devious Destiny cocked its hammer and prepared to shoot the works.

There wasn't any traffic on the single, shack-lined street of the town, and with a little chill, Mr. Weeble came to a full stop. A boom town with nothing, nobody stirring. Obviously, something was wrong. Even the tall, dark derricks behind the town had a listless look, as though the wells themselves were all bored—and at that Mr. Weeble shuddered.

The fear that came now was too horrible to think about.

Another oil boom gone bing, and he'd hoofed twenty-seven mountainous miles to find it out. Twenty-seven over, twenty-seven back . . . Appalled, he blinked hard, spied a lone figure up the street a piece, and with a desperate flicker of resurgent hope, hobbled on.

"I—I beg pard—" he began breathlessly, and gulped in swift terror as the man whirled.

No mistaking the tiger-deadliness of that spin, or of the hand pistoning toward the belt. There was a black gun under that mohair coat. But the hand stopped short, and from the parted lips came a little, sharp breath.

"O-oh! I thought you was—"

The other man let it slide, with a taut shrug. He was an officer, Mr. Weeble noted, with the battered star of a town marshal on his breast. And bank-bred little Mr. Weeble's awe of the law was indeed awful. Choking, he tried again to thaw the words out of his fright-frozen throat; and once again the world seemed to explode, right under him.

THERE came the bull bellow of a motor, the wild scream of a horn; and the officer moved like a bullet from a gun. With the fury of a blocking back, he hit Mr. Weeble amidships, catapulting them both toward the sidewalk.

The big car—Mr. Weeble never did figure just where that car came from—missed them by a scant six inches.

But it did miss. Braking, it reeled crazily on up the street, bouncing high; and a jeering yell came back. As the marshal picked him up, curiously, the main thing that the scared Mr. Weeble noted was the set grayness of the officer's face.

"That's him." Of a sudden the marshal seemed to have forgotten Mr. Weeble was even there. "Peak Pike, back in town. And I got to—"

Bleak-eyed, he turned, staring up the street where the big car had roared around a corner. And then, at a queer, dogged shuffle, he started after it, not looking back.

"I—I say, I'm—obliged," Mr. Weeble stammered futilely, after the retreating back, and stopped, with a helpless feeling. His thanks didn't matter, he sensed. He had been less than a pawn in a swift, deadly game, for that hadn't been any accident. It had been a cold-blooded, deliberate attempt at murder.

That driver, Peak Pike, had been trying to kill the marshal. Mr. Weeble had been just the usual innocent bystander. Yet, even in his own peril the officer had remembered to save Mr. Weeble too, and for that Mr. Weeble was grateful.

But what, if anything, he was going to do about it was something else again, of course. Feeling thoroughly depressed, he twisted, and brightened abruptly as a familiar sign caught his eye.

Lou Brouer, Jeweler. Watches, Clocks, Guns and Other Fine Jewelry Fixed. Good or Cheap.

Following the oil booms, Lou carried that sign with him wherever he went, and Mr. Weeble had seen it by now in a half dozen such shack-camps.

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Recovering his battered derby, he hurried over.

Looking much the same as ever, crippled little Lou was at his workbench just inside the door, with the parts of a dismantled pistol in his hands. But obviously he had been watching. His birdlike gesture of greeting said that much, even before his words.

"Hi, Weeble. Prett' nigh led off in our sudden-death drive, didn't you? How yuh like our scared city?"

"Why I—I don't quite comprehend—" began Mr. Weeble, but Lou wasn't listening. Already he had hitched himself over to the window again, pressing his face against the glass to peer up the street.

"Uh. Guess Pike didn't stop," he decided. "Marshal Stowe's just standin' there, on the corner. But that dirty, sidewindin' son of a snake, Pike, what he'll do to pore Lige—"

A baffled fury on his wizened face, the little watchmaker twisted back to his bench, slamming the pistol together once more.

"It's murder, that's all," he exploded. "Lige Stowe ain't got no more chanct than a rabbit. That Peak Pike's the fastest gunman in West Texas, and this yella-bellied burg, too scairt to back up the only man in it's kept this a decent place to live. . . . Ahhh!"

He slapped the final screw into the big revolver and began to pick up cartridges scattered across the bench, cramming them into the cylinder. Viciously, he swung the gun, aiming at the window, and, too late, Mr. Weeble squawked startled warning.

"Hey! Hey! Good goodness, look—" But the hammer was falling. It struck with a harmless click, no more, and Lou snarled savagely.

"Aw, they ain't no good. Just dummies I use to test the gun. But I wisht—I wisht—" The gun snapped, four times more, hinting pretty broadly what Lou wished. Then, irritably, he jacked the dud shells out and dropped the weapon into the drawer.

"You see, if Peak takes over this burg like he's tryin' to, why he will make it Hell a-bellerin'," he said, with hard anger. "They had him in jail, over't the county seat, for a shootin' he done here that Stowe arrested him for. But they was too yella to convict him, so now he's loose, and gunnin' for Lige. And if he gits him—well you got a sample what to look for just now, didn't yuh?"

FEELING slightly ill, Mr. Weeble took off his battered derby and fanned himself, wondering if the rocky Mr. Pike would remember who had been siding the marshal in that misfired massacre just now.

Mr. Weeble's Norse mustache was all intrigued about it, fairly wriggling and itching for more. But the quivering remainder of Mr. Weeble, looking much like a meek, little rabbit, peering from behind a burning bush—the remainder of Mr. Weeble was wishing fervently he was somewhere safe, some place where oilfield killers. . . .

Like an ominous period, the flat, ominous smack of an explosion, a single shot, came from up the street, and both men jumped.

"Oh-oh!" Gasping, Lou Brouer flung his crippled body toward the window. Pressing close beside him, Mr. Weeble could just make out through the distorting glass the figure of a man up on the corner.

It was Marshal Lige Stowe, he was quite sure, all alone, and hit. Badly hit, evidently, judging by the dazed way he clung to a telephone pole. The ghastly silence seemed to yawn and strain, and then a man came cautiously out of a store, then another, another, running toward the wounded officer.

Lou Brouer swung, with a throaty snarl.

"The dirty skunk! He's got Lige. You stay here, outa sight. I'm goin' up there."

He twisted from behind the bench and out of the door; and after an uncertain moment, Mr. Weeble sat down in his place, thinking maybe from there he could see through the window better.

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But he couldn't, he discovered. Slantwise, the glass made everything look green, and a crowd had gathered by now anyway, effectively completing the ruin of the view.

Apparently, though, they were helping—helping, not carrying—the wounded Stowe into a store. So he must not yet be entirely and irrevocably dead. But, as certainly, he was hit, beaten. The town was Peak Pike's, to do with as he would.

And at that thought Mr. Weeble laid down his derby, to do his shivering with both hands.

The way his flayed feet felt, undoubtedly they'd just kill him from the ground up if he tried beating it right back out of here. But if he stayed. . . . Again devious Destiny sneaked up and bit him, right on the unawares.

A giant figure came through the door, like a flickering thunderstorm; and with a gasp of supreme horror, Mr. Weeble discovered himself practically muzzle to muzzle with what looked to be anyhow a sixteen-incher cannon.

Behind the artillery was a face so cold that it must have been originally caught in a blizzard with a beartrap. It was Peak Pike, Mr. Weeble knew instantly, in one of those psychic flashes people are supposed to get in their last moments.

The black muzzle seemed to poise itself, like a tobacco chewer preparing to spit, and then, with the effect of an iceberg breaking, the face opened to emit a voice:

"You the mugg fixes jewelry?"

"Uh-wawk!" said Mr. Weeble faintly, and went dead white as the hammer clicked back. But the gun cantered abruptly downward instead, a thumb flicked open the loading gate, and Pike began to spill cartridges down on the littered benchtop.

"Cylinder stop on this here baby's loose or somethin', see?" the voice explained. "Don't lock her in line. Like to kicked my arm off she did, just now. Fix it!"

The gun thumped down, right under Mr. Weeble's whiffletree whiskers.

"Why, I—er—awk!" Mr. Weeble clogged up again. Peak Pike's left hand had moved like a piece of highspeed machinery—in, out. Now it held one of those social stimulators popularly referred to in the oil country as a blooey knife. With a suggestive whicker, the blade sprang out.

IT WAS somewhat smaller than a heavy cavalry saber, that blade, so Mr. Weeble noted feebly. But only somewhat. Like a gliding snake it slid forward to flick his mustache, pause just abaft his gullet, then finally tick down against the frame of the revolver.

"Right there, see?" observed Pike casually. "Got me a guy I want to finish takin' that to, Whiskers, so get goin'. If you ain't finished in five minutes, sheep-shearin' season starts, see?"

The blade flicked the tip of the mustache again, then began excavations beneath Mr. Peak Pike's dark nails, maybe grave-digging.

But with a sudden flush, Mr. Weeble broke his paralysis.

Mild little soul that he was, raised on contented milk and by three maiden aunts, there were all sorts of things one could do to Mr. Weeble with entire impunity. But among them was not pulling his whiskers. For somewhere, far back in the seaweed sections of Mr. Weeble's family tree undoubtedly there had been Vikings, bold, bad Berserks with bristling hair on the stiff upper lips—and what do you suppose they did to those tickling their handlebars with snickersnees? Things too horrible, even for history to tell. With a sudden suggestion of craft in his mild eyes, Mr. Weeble crouched swiftly down behind that enraged mustache, and picked up the gun.

He had learned a little about weapons during his wanderings, and the Colt's single-action, after all, is just about the simplest of revolvers. So, without too much trouble, he got the stock off.

The sear-spring—the little, two-fingered jigger which bears on the trigger and also the cylinder stop—just had its screw loose, he discovered. A trifle to fix.

A bit more slowly, he put the pistol

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back together and reloaded it, with a look like a lamb looking lamblike. Perhaps it was too much so, for suddenly that apple slicer was again tickling his Adam's apple.

"Ain't gettin' cemeterial idees, was yuh, Whiskers?" inquired Peak and took the gun with a vicious yank. "Uh huh. Le's see, now." The gun swung and if Mr. Weeble hadn't gulped hurriedly his heart would have popped right out and run off all by itself. For the muzzle was trained right on him.

But Peak Pike was only testing the action, cocking and uncocking the hammer, grinning pleasurably down at his victim.

"Yep, okay," he decided, and slid the pistol out of sight. "Now I think I'll just go down me a cup of Java—and the rest of that John Law. You know, I don't think I shot him sufficient."

Mr. Pike gestured with the knife, and grinned. "Oh yeah, and I owe you something, don't I? Well, sir, just a little tip—"

The knife moved in a silvered flash, white hot agony wrenched the right side of little Mr. Weeble's horrified face, and he heard Peak Pike's exploding guffaw.

"Just to keep you reminded, Goatface. Standin' on the wrong side of the street's dangerous in this burg. You're liable to get clipped."

Still hooting merrily, Mr. Pike paraded out the door; and the red radiance strewing from his fingers was indeed a tip. Very literally so. It was a good inch anyhow, from the right end of Mr. Weeble's mustache.

A CLOSE shave, a clip and a trimming, all in the matter of minutes. And to say nothing of the free soul-singe Mr. Pike had generously tossed in. With such a red rage riding him as only the old Norsemen knew in their Norseiest moment, Mr. Weeble arose with a roar to demolish and destroy.

Or, that is, he started to arise. But he had forgotten the sheltering workbench and stool.

Bench and stool had not forgotten however. Promptly they threw a block that would have chopped down a whole Southern California backfield; and by the time Mr. Weeble had recovered. Pike Peak was entering the Owl Café, clear across the street.

Which was, perhaps, just as well, Mr. Weeble reluctantly conceded. A five-foot-two mite attacking such an orey-eyed giant might have ended up—well somewhat awfully.

Besides, there were perhaps better ways. Brain subduing brawn, and all that. With a ferocious gleam in his faded eyes, Mr. Webble felt of his mustachio, with the tender touch of a mother seeking to sooth a hideously outraged offspring.

And then, decisively, he reached into the bench drawer, extracting the repaired pistol Lou had dropped therein.

It also was a forty-five, he noted with satisfaction, and even wickeder-looking than Mr. Pike's mountain howitzer. Carefully choosing the duller cartridges scattered across the benchtop, he loaded it and thrust it awkwardly into his waistband.

By lifelong training he was scared to death of firearms, empty or otherwise, and even now his tummy was trying to retreat behind his backbone. But there are, as somebody has said, times and times and even places and this seemed to be all of them.

Rescuing his derby, which had been caved into something curiously resembling a Viking helmet, Mr. Weeble placed it carefully on his head, and gave his glasses a vigorous push into place.

Then, valiantly, he swung toward the door.

Through the café window across the street he could see Peak Pike leisurely consuming a spot of Java as he came out, and for a moment Mr. Weeble hesitated. But then he headed up the street.

After all, he told himself, one must do things properly. The marshal was the proper man to consult before continuing the campaign against wickedness—provided, of course, the marshal was in any condition to consult. Still, even if Stowe was completely out of it, there surely

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would be someone else to represent law and order, even though only law and order on the lam.

This must be done right, Mr. Weeble told himself firmly; so he hurried.

Pushing apologetically through the crowd about the entrance of the place into which Marshall Stowe had been carried, he found himself in a drugstore carrying the usual drug items like automobile tires, insurance and hardware; and over at a side counter he spotted Lou Brouer.

The counter was piled with an assortment of large rat traps, which Lou was carefully setting with an abstracted viciousness which pretty well indicated his thoughts. He waved a trap grimly at Mr. Weeble and answered his question before Mr. Weeble could ask it.

"He's back in there. Doc's still workin' on him." Mr. Brouer made vicious motions with the trap, indicating the partition in the rear, then gestured bleakly toward the blood-soaked coat and vest, on the counter beside the traps. "He prob'ly won't die, Doc says. But he's pretty bad hit. And what this town's goin' to do without him—"

He didn't finish that. There was a sudden, bleak silence that seemed to chop him off, and after a moment, a tall man cleared his throat harshly. "You mean, what Pike and his crowd will do now!" he snapped. "That two-gun terror, runnin wild, and the only man who dared face him, downed!"

"Uh, two gun?" Mr. Weeble gulped, with a sudden, appalled feel. "Uh, no, no, I'm sure. One gun! I just fixed it for him. I—er—if the marshal is incapacitated why doesn't someone else here go arrest Mr. Pike? I am quite certain it could be done quite easily."

"Oh, you are, are yuh?" cut in the tall man with a certain, savage dryness, and somebody else laughed—a hard slash of sound. Laughed, and then gasped abruptly. Eyes glittering, little Lou Brouer shoved forward.

"Wait a minute! You fixed his gun for him, you say? Fixed Peak Pike's gat? Oh, oh! So that's what's wrong with them whiskers of you'n, huh? Is—is he dead yet?"

"Why, no, no, of course not," said Mr. Weeble indignantly. "But I—I'm quite sure I—" He was cut short by Brouer's delighted yelp.

"Hot dog! Leave him have Lige's star and gun, Mayor!" He assailed the tall man. "Peak Pike's stuck up too fur, and here's where he gits shoveled down. Leave Mr. Weeble here be marshal just five minutes, for this here is Mr. Weeble. You remember, I told you! One yank on them whisker and the fireworks start. I told you—"

"Weeble! Is that who you are!" Jaw dropped, the tall mayor was gaping. He had false teeth, Mr. Weeble noted abstractedly, both plates apparently a bit loose. So that just now he looked like a bad case of ingrown double chin. "I—I—I can't believe it!" he gulped and grimaced hurried apology. "Uh, all I've done heerd about you, I mean. And you—you've done fixed Peak Pike's pistol so's it won't shoot?"

"Why I, er, I did do a little—" began Mr. Weeble, with becoming modesty, and once again was chopped off, this time not by sound, but instead sight.

The mayor's face was one, all of a sudden, a horrible twisting as though he had just swallowed both plates and they were biting him all the way down. His bulging eyes were fixed on something behind Mr. Weeble's back.

Mystified, Mr. Weeble started to turn; and a tornado or something caught him firmly by the back of the neck and hoisted him high.

"So," said a voice of thunder in his ear. "Fixed my pistol for me, did you, Whiskers? Well, what I'm goin' to do to you now—with your own gat!"

A HUGE hand plucked the artillery from Mr. Weeble's middle, he caught one horrified glimpse of a snarling, Peak Pikian face, and then he was sailing through mid-air.

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Doubtless, after the manner of erupting Peaks, Mr. Pike had merely thought to toss and toy with his victim before destroying him root and branch. But if so, Mr. Pike's intentions were defeated by his own craggy strength.

Sailing a wee bit too far, Mr. Weeble lit pants first on the counter where Lou Brouer had just been setting the traps. There was a vicious snap, and Mr. Weeble arose, with the combined shriek of a rocket and wail of a damned soul.

He had been torpedoed squarely amidships by a bulldog trap that now was doing its duty with all the tenacity and enthusiasm of a Georgia snapping turtle waiting for sunset.

Mr. Weeble was trapped. Trapped like a mouse, and with his mountainous destroyer guffawing merrily and waving his own pistol in his face. But Mr. Weeble was no mouse.

In his scrawny breast beat the heart of a David; to say nothing of said heart's operating on blood that had come down in one salty stream from old Leif the Lucky and Eric the Red.

Red whiskers glaring, Mr. Weeble went up like a rocket. But he came down like a bomb. And when he lit he was in action, throwing rat traps with both hands.

Set, hair-triggered, and gulping for gore, a bursting barrage of rat catcher exploded about the towering Peak's rocky head. Some of them went off on impact, some didn't. Some missed and went on in search of diving victims beyond.

But as Mr. Pike ducked wildly, one sheared his ear with a lovely *s-s-shick,* and with a soul-searing yell, Peak Pike crouched and swung his captured cannon, pointblank. With an answering shriek, little Mr. Weeble, utterly berserk, went at him, in one reeling, derby-first dive.

It was magnificent, incredible, or even something. The mouse, charging the mountain, belaboring the mountain begad, and with but one poor rat trap.

Diving right under that swinging gun, Mr. Weeble came up, butted Peak's elbow with his head, sent the gun spinning, and made a savage slash at Pike's face with the set, scowling jaws of that trap. All in one dizzy flash.

Furthermore, with his free hand he caught the flying gun, kicked the giant on one or both shins, saw the frantic gunman's other hand drive desperately for further weapons, beneath his coat; and shoved that rat trap squarely in the way.

With a delighted snicker, the trap gave Mr. Peak Pike the gladhand, or maybe the other way around. It didn't really matter much by then.

By then the recaptured artillery was descending butt first on Mr. Pike's head, bouncing and encoring a solid, smash hit. Losing interest at this point, Mr. Pike assumed a demilitarized position, flat on the floor.

It was all over; and it had taken just about as long as a carload of nitroglycerine requires to prepare a place for the weary business of completly replacing the whole world. Red flames of victory shooting clear through the thick lenses of

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his spectacles, little Mr. Weeble knelt, thoughtfully removing that knife and the other pistol from Mr. Pike's recumbent corpse. Only then did he remove that other trap from his own rear areas, and turn toward the awed audience with a mild, benevolent beam.

"Er, uh, here's your bad man, gentlemen," he announced diffidently, and smiled, a shy smile, at the mayor's plates' ajar gape. "If—if somebody will kindly take him out of the trap and, er, carry him to jail while he's still unconscious. . . ."

He gestured casually.

"Good Lord!" That was Lou Brouer, enormously awed. "Ketched him, by grab! Ketched the man mountain in a mousetrap! He'll never live it down, never, never. He'll jest go bite hisself to death from shame. But—but that air pistol of his'n. . . ."

"Oh, the pistol." Mr. Weeble blushed modestly. "It—it wasn't dangerous. I—I fixed it, you know, when he brought it in. Loaded it with those dummy cartridges you had. So he couldn't have shot—"

"But, yuh jughead, it wasn't his pistol he was tryin' to shoot yuh with!" exploded Mr. Brouer. "It was you'rn. The one you was packin' anyways. And he, he—why don't you sabe—"

"Oh, this one was harmless too." His smile positively coy, Mr. Weeble swung up the sturdy weapon with which Mr. Pike had just been attempting to liquidate him. "I—it wouldn't have been sporting, would it? I mean—I might have shot somebody! So I—I just loaded this one with dummies too. See, it—"

"Ker-bloom!" said the harmless gun, with the terrific roar of a stuka bomb. Glass screamed wildly as a skylight went skittering over the frantically ducking audience. And the world began to rock and reel.

"I—I—my word!" said Mr. Weeble faintly. "Will—will somebody catch me? I—I think I'm going to be sick!"

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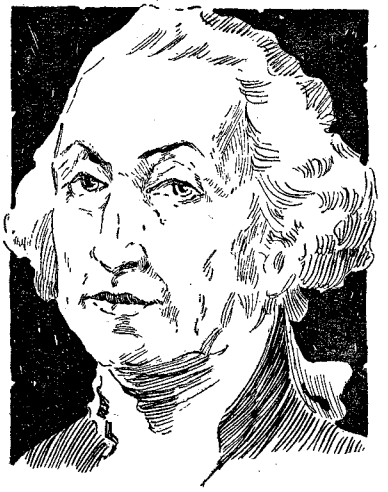
· HATS ·

Hats were first worn by the Phrygians, to set themselves apart from conquered nations.



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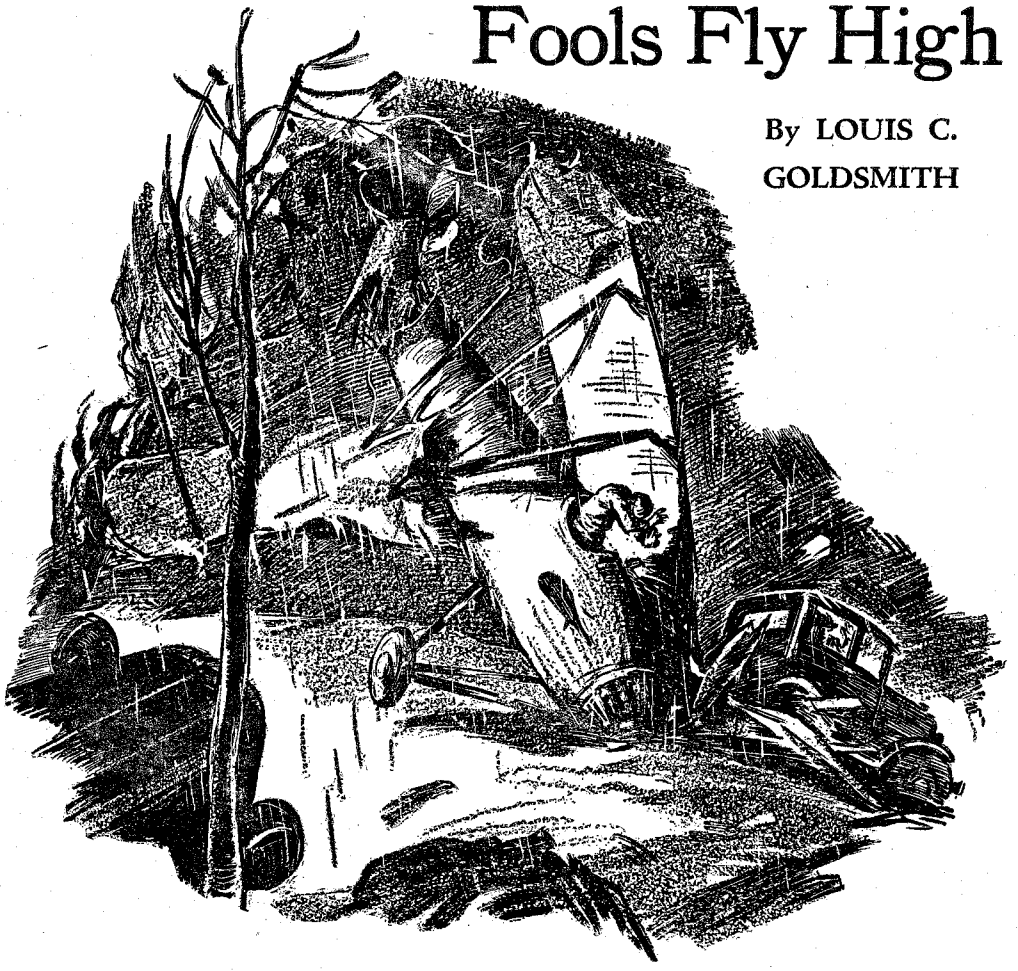
Fools Fly High

By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH



Moore half rose, guarding his face, as the plane drove into the earth

IN THE early twenties flyers were wild men, and LIEUTENANT DAN MOORE was one of the most daring of them all. Because of his brilliant record, he was sure of his job at the Army flying school; and so his suspension—the result of a government economy bill—found him totally unprepared.

But Moore is not even permitted an honorable departure from the Air Service. He finds himself facing a court-martial, and that is the work of his bitterest enemy, CAPTAIN ALVIN NAGEL. Nagel, always jealous of Moore, has managed to fasten the responsibility for a crackup on the big lieutenant; and in a moment of unthinking anger Moore strikes his superior officer—before civilians. Disgusted and hopeless, Moore will not defend himself before the court-martial board; and therefore his dismissal seems inevitable, though the decision will not be announced for some time. At any rate, Dan Moore is granted indefinite leave of absence; he's getting out of the Army now.

ON THE train Moore meets young JULIAN HOYT and his sister THERESA. Just a few days before Moore had been responsible for Hoyt's expulsion from the flying school, having reported that the cadet was depending on instruments in his maneuvers. This was a particularly unpleasant duty for Moore, because he had met Theresa Hoyt

This story began in the Argosy for December 7

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(called Trick) and been strongly attracted by her. But now, on the train, he finds that the Hoyts hold no grudge against him.

In fact, young Hoyt wants to organize a flying circus, with Dan Moore the feature attraction. This is to be only a means to an end—for Julian Hoyt has dedicated himself to the scientific improvement of flying. He is convinced that instruments can be made dependable—a dream which Moore, with his World War training, considers impractical. Anyway Dan Moore says he's fed up with flying; he is going to get a job on a small-town newspaper.

IN THE little town of Selma, Moore looks up TOM DAWSON, editor of a local weekly, and they proceed to get drunk together. When Moore learns that the local money-bags, one BERT TALLERAND, owns an ancient airplane, he proposes that they go out at once and fly it. Accompanied by a drunken ally, AL BIBBS, they do just that; and all three of them end up in jail.

The next day is full of too many surprises for a man with a bad hangover. Theresa Hoyt has followed Dan Moore to Selma, and she promptly gets him out of jail. She is able to do this because she has just purchased Bert Tallerand's airplane, and Mr. Tallerand is now quite willing to dismiss complaints against Dan Moore. In fact, he offers Moore a job on his paper, the Alcova *News,* which the flyer accepts.

It looks like just the chance he has been wanting; and—though Tom Dawson has warned him against Tallerand—Dan settles down happily in his little office.

BUT Moore is soon disillusioned with the newspaper and with Mr. Tallerand. The latter, he discovers, is a grasping hypocrite, at present campaigning for state senator. Dan Moore spends most of his time with Trick Hoyt and Al Bibbs, helping them to renovate the old plane she has bought. This is finally accomplished; an air show is announced; and Dan conceives a method of deflating Bert Tallerand.

Before a large crowd, Moore takes Tallerand for a plane ride and puts him through such a series of stunts that the man is quivering with terror when he finally reaches ground.

The citizens get the point.

Expecting reprisals from Tallerand, Moore and Trick Hoyt leave town in the renovated crate. They land outside a neighboring town in the coal-mining region—to learn that a man named JAKE REGAN has a burst appendix and must be rushed to a hospital. There's a bad storm coming, but Dan Moore agrees to fly the sick man. . . .

CHAPTER XIX

FLYING AMBULANCE

THERESA HOYT looked at Moore in horrified silence, felt the gulf between them widen. It had always been that way, since she'd first met him. One moment he seemed near to her, as though they had known each other for a lifetime and the next instant he would be as remote, as incomprehensible as any stranger.

They seemed to stand there alone, in the light fall of rain that had started, their eyes meeting in this clash of wills. "Have you thought," she demanded, "that you, too, will die in that airplane crash? You'll be flying in the front cockpit."

His smile mocked her. "Get an engine in my lap, eh? That's part of this crazy game, Trick. Now you take care of Mrs. Regan while I get the ship ready."

He turned from her hopeless gesture and for the first time was aware of the car that had stopped a few yards from the plane. It was a light truck. There was a prone figure in the back, swathed in layers of blankets.

A man came toward him, limping badly, his right arm strapped to his chest. "I'm Doctor Gates," he explained, "company physician. We brought gasoline for you—five five-gallon cans. The garage mechanic said he thought you'd want heavy lubricating oil, but I got two gallons of medium, as well as the heavy."

"That's using your head, doc," Moore told him. "Your patient won't be able to lie down. Not room enough. You'll have to strap him in the seat."

"That'll be all right, for a short time. We'll bundle him up well in blankets. I brought a washtub full of cracked ice. We'll make a large pad of that for his stomach, and I'll give him a hypo just before you leave."

"Fine! I'll unfasten the dual controls. You and the other fella take care of the rest."

Trick listened to this casual interchange. It was so commonplace, so completely devoid of dramatics. In that way these two

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men, the doctor and the airplane pilot, were alike; familiar with death, accepting its nearness with something like contempt. The way they talk, she thought, it might be plans for a camping trip.

MOORE was putting gasoline in the main tank. "I haven't any map," he called to the doctor, "and I'm not very familiar with this country. There's a good hospital in Selma, though. And I know a landing field in Alcova, just across the river."

"That'll be all right. Doctor Holmes, in Selma, is a splendid surgeon."

"What happens to them—I mean, with a burst appendix?"

"Peritonitis. It's deadly. I could have handled it here, only I broke my arm in a mine accident."

Moore tossed an empty gasoline can aside and screwed the tank cap on tight. "Soon's you get back in town," he directed, "call the Selma hospital long distance. Have 'em out to Tallerand's field with an ambulance. Better have Trick—Miss Hoyt explain that to them."

They were ready, the unconscious Regan strapped like a mummy in the rear cockpit. Doctor Gates had given him a final hypodermic.

Dan called Trick to him. He had an old envelope and a pencil. It was getting so dark now that she could barely make out his sketch of the two towns, the river, bridge, road, and the pasture where Tallerand had built his airplane shed.

"This is north," he indicated. "The town side of the field. Try to get hold of Al Bibbs, or some responsible person. Have them get together a bunch of automobiles. If the wind is *from* the north, have them park their cars at the extreme *south* end of the field, with their headlights pointing north. If the wind is from the *south,* have them park at the *north* end, headed south. That clear?"

She repeated his instructions, trying to keep her voice steady. They were crouched near together, their bodies shielding the paper from an increased drive of rain. She could feel his arm against her shoulder, could sense his confidence. This was the most important part of his instructions, and he trusted them to her, rather than the doctor.

A change came in her attitude toward the flight. It was a thing that had to be done. If you looked at it through his eyes and mind there was no way of avoiding it, no more than he would have considered avoiding one of his patrols, during the war. She felt a glow of pride in being a part of this, even a small part; and in having his trust.

"You'll want their headlights turned on, just as soon as they hear your engine?"

He nodded.

"That's it, Trick. You're a smart kid. I'll be back tomorrow and we'll carry on, eh?"

She nodded, not trusting her voice. He had said there was one chance in twenty, and Dan Moore wouldn't exaggerate the dangers of flying.

HE CHECKED to be sure that the controls were free to move, that the blankets were tied securely so they wouldn't be blown into them. He took Doctor Gates' helper to the nose of the plane and rehearsed him in swinging the propeller. On the way back around the wing he paused, face lifted, studying the movements of the clouds. His hands were polishing the lenses of his goggles.

There was still some daylight remaining. It had taken them an hour and fifty minutes to reach here from Alcova. But it would take a longer time returning, against a quartering wind that would increase in velocity as time passed and as he climbed to a higher altitude.

They got the engine started, finally. The man was afraid of the propeller; didn't pull it through smartly.

Moore warmed the engine, zig-zagging slowly down the field, examining the surface. At the lee end he turned and, still moving from the turn, opened throttle.

He climbed slowly and banked. The shadowy earth rushed under his canted wings. But that was only the ground wind

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drifting him. Aloft and clear of the low hills it would change to northwest.

He steadied on course, remembering the angle at which they had crossed the road, approaching town. He allowed a little more southing to that course. It was almost certain that he would be able to see the river, no matter how dark. He'd follow that north, keeping low enough to see any bridges and checking those with the towns. A bridge, with a heavy cluster of street lights on each side, would give a definite location.

At a thousand feet he leveled off the climb. He shifted to a more comfortable position, cheek cuddled against the left cockpit cowling pad, staring ahead into the cold, wet blast of wind from the propeller.

There were lights below, tiny sparks that drifted by and were distorted by the film of rainwater on his goggles. Those were lanterns, or lights shining from farmhouse windows. In another hour they would be out, the country asleep.

Time passed. He should be intercepting the river very soon. That is, if it didn't make a sharp bend to the east. Or if he still held approximately the course he'd taken on leaving.

There was no compass in the ship. But even at night, in a light rain, it was possible to make out dark and light spots below, and from them project a line ahead. They were clusters of trees or plowed ground, contrasting with stubble fields.

There were no ground lights now and the demarkation between earth and sky was so faint that he could barely make out the horizon line ahead. He was alone, in a vast space of darkness.

But not exactly alone. There was the man back of him. The man named Jake Regan. Or was he still alive?

Moore grinned. A fine thing, if he did get to Alcova with a corpse sitting up in the rear cockpit. Like that gunner he'd landed in the Bristol fighter. His arm had caught over the machine-gun turnal so that he sat erect, head back, death-grinning at the three Fokkers that turned disgruntledly toward the German line.

THE rain was increasing, the air becoming rougher. And there were times when the horizon blotted out. That was bad. A man couldn't fly without seeing the horizon; without being able to distinguish between earth and sky.

All he could do at such times was hold controls in neutral, disregarding his own senses of balance. For it was a strange fact that the instant a man lost outside vision his senses immediately started lying to him. They were like urgent voices, shouting for attention: *You fool, you're in a turn! You're left wing's down! You're in a dive! Pull back on the stick!*

And that was the problem that Red Hoyt, Trick's brother, had determined to solve. By instruments! As though mankind could make instruments as delicate and responsive as those in the human body.

The kid's idea was that with those instruments a man could fly in weather like this. Fly safely! Maybe he thought they'd tow glider planes, with people in them, the way an engine pulls a string of passenger cars. He'd heard talk like that.

But Hoyt was a good kid. He had the makings of a good pilot, if he'd forget that instrument foolishness.

Moore caught the stick back. He'd come within a few feet of striking the treetops. They made an even rank, lined north and south. At least he thought that was the direction.

It was. And beyond the trees was a white, narrow margin of sandy beach. The river.

He ruddered to the left and dropped down to within a few feet of the water. He couldn't see it. The rain was steadily increasing in force so that there was nothing but blackness under him. But he could judge height from the shoreline on his left. And the dim white strip of it helped him maintain his sense of balance.

He was busy constantly now with stick and rudder, keeping the plane leveled in an increasing air turbulance. And that rough air meant that the storm was getting worse, that it might close down on him any instant.

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There was a cold, steady flow of water off his goggles and down his face. His helmet was soggy with it, his shoulders drenched.

He tried to see the radium dial of his wristwatch. The small numbers and the hands blurred from vibration of the ship. But he had been up a long time. His gasoline must be running low.

A faint loom of lights grew ahead of him, on both sides of the river. "Ten more minutes," he shouted, exultantly. "Hold this damn rain off ten more minutes and I'll make it."

The engine sputtered. The effect was like a sharp knife point raked down his spinal column. He switched to the center-section reserve, pumping pressure, trying to catch up the last few drops in the main tank.

There were seven gallons up there. And he was bucking a heavy wind. But the longer he stayed aloft the more time it would have to affect him. He shoved the throttle wide open.

The lights grew in brightness, reflected by the ragged cloud base.

He wouldn't have time to circle either town. He'd have to gamble that the telephone call had gone through.

THE pasture was about three miles south of town. He pulled back in an easy climb; turning. The white shore disappeared immediately. The rain had increased until there was no difference in ground and sky shading. Only the glow of lights to keep his sense of balance.

He had to estimate the width of space between river and field. He turned north again, searching for the automobile lights.

If they had made a mistake and parked their cars on the windward end of the field he would certainly crack up. He would have to take that chance. He couldn't see anything, even if he did circle the field. And that reserve tank might go dry any moment now.

He saw the car lights; dim, parallel ribbons. He would be landing from the south. That was good, because there were two trees at the north end, set close together. They would keep him from making a low approach.

A momentary lull came in the storm. The headlights of the cars brightened, and he saw that he had too much altitude.

His hand, gripping the joy stick, moved sharply to the left and he kicked full right rudder. Wind lashed his cheek as he plunged sideways toward the ground.

With the variations in rain intensity there was no judging altitude by the dimness or brightness of the lights. Instinctively his eyes were triangulating the distance. It was one of the wonders of human vision. "Four feet apart," he muttered, as though instructing his eyes, "headlights are about four feet apart."

Suddenly the full force of the storm struck him. He leveled from the sideslip. He must be very close to the ground. But the headlights had almost disappeared in that downrush of water.

For him the water came from straight ahead, thrown back by the propeller and his travel speed. He sputtered for breath, drawing it in through close-set lips. It was like a fire hose on his face.

Such force of rain couldn't last long. But it might continue for ten minutes or more. He had to land on this first approach.

Right now the headlights were almost under him. He pulled the nose up, again shoved stick and opposite rudder; stalling in a sideslip.

It was a mad thing to do. But it was necessary. He had to get rid of that excess altitude while he could still see the lights.

Once he had passed them; once they had disappeared from sight behind him; he would be overshooting the field. And, too, he would lose all sense of balance.

They were gone!

He flattened from the sideslip, dropped the nose slightly.

His eyes were straining down through the moiling rush of water, trying to catch the first glimpse of ground objects before he struck. He couldn't land at this angle, with nose down. His hand came back, pulling the nose up in a stall.

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It had to be a landing now, willy-nilly. He might be ten feet or a hundred feet from the ground.

The ship dropped in the stall. He'd lost all flying speed. The controls were slack and useless.

His hand swept up to his goggles, raking them off his eyes. He turned sideways, as far as he could, in the seat. His left arm came up to protect his head.

The ship struck. His head jerked forward with stunning impact.

There was a ripping, splintering sound from behind. The tailskid—more likely the whole rear end of the fuselage smashed!

He was thrown forward. Hot, agonizing pain swept up through his left arm. A giant hand seemed to close over the right wing, splintering it, jerking it backward. Then the left wing crumbled.

There came that abrupt silence, so familiar to him.

It seemed that he sat there for minutes, unable to move, his brain functions at a standstill.

He straightened in the seat. "Well, she can't burn," he heard his own voice say.

His left arm dropped to his lap. He was aware of pain. The fingers were numb and useless. He pulled the clasp of his safety belt.

Cars were approaching him from the rear. Rain made straight, glistening white lines in the increasing glow of their headlights.

He stood up in the cockpit, supporting his weight with his right arm. It was going to be a job getting out and onto the ground. The headlights were all around him. Black shapes of men were silhouetted against their glare.

Dan fumbled with his toe outside the cockpit, trying to get it into the step-notch.

Hands were reaching up to help him. "It won't burn," he informed them. It seemed important they should know that. "There's no more than a cupful of gasoline in it."

He stood on the ground. There was something wrong with his knee. He licked his upper lip. Funny about that rain. Salty.

CHAPTER XX

GET UP, BARNSTORMER

DAN wiggled the fingers of his left hand. They looked very brown, contrasted with the white sheet of the hospital bed.

The nurse was watching, smiling. She was Irish. Small. Jet-black hair and blue eyes and a dimple. Cute as a bug's ear.

"I suppose you're all ready to fly again," she remarked.

"That's right, Mick," he said, feeling of his bandage-swathed head. "Doc promised I'd get rid of this Turk's turban today."

She stood with hands on her hips. "I was here the night they brought you in," she said. "Looked like somebody'd doused a bucket of blood into your face. What a mess! If somebody'd wanted to bet on your chance against Regan's, I'd of given 'em long odds on Jake Regan."

"Us English are hard to kill."

"English!" she snorted. "You're as Irish as I am, and you know it."

"Oh! So you'd insult a poor, helpless patient, would ye?"

"Here comes Trick and the doctor," she warned. "I think Doc Holmes would like to steal your redhead," she added, in a hurried whisper.

"Ah, an' she's got a bottle!" Dan smacked his lips, lifting his voice in song:

And when I die, don't bury me at all,
Just pickle my bones in alcohol.
Put a bottle of booze at my head and feet,
And then I think my soul will keep.

"Shush off that ribaldry!" Trick commanded, unwrapping the bottle. "It's soda water—a very extra-special good flavor."

"Soda water! What's soda water for, except to dilute good Scotch?"

"Hold still with that head," Doctor Holmes ordered, loosening the bandages.

"How's Jake Regan?"

"Fine. The old duffer cusses like a pirate because I won't let him go back to his mine."

Mickey Devers brought him a mirror. He turned his head this way and that,

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examining the V-shaped scar over his right eye. "Handsome," he commented. "Makes me look even handsomer than I was."

"You handsome!" Mickey scoffed. "That face'd stop a clock."

"I want my clothes, doc."

"Well . . . well, I guess there's no reason why you shouldn't walk around a little. How's your wrist feel?"

"All cured up, thanks to your marvelous skill."

Holmes scowled at the rank flattery. "Thanks don't buy any new clothes for my poor old back," he grunted. "Come on," he said to Mick, "we'll make Miss Hoyt listen to his bragging for a while."

BUT Dan didn't feel like bragging, when they'd gone. Of course Doc Holmes had been joking about the new clothes. He probably thought Dan had a wad of money.

Everybody seemed to think an airplane pilot had lots of money. Look at this room they'd put him in. The best private ward in the hospital, Mick had told him. Even had a telephone.

And then there was Trick's airplane. They'd told him about that. A complete washout. Even the engine. He'd first struck the ground about thirty feet from the two trees, at the north end of the field. Smashed the whole tail end. And the trees had stripped his wings.

Trick sat, watching his gloomy face. "What's bothering you, Dan?"

"Nothing," he said, avoiding her glance.

"Don't lie to Grandma Trick. What is it?"

He twisted his shoulders impatiently. "It's me, damn it! Or my fate. Whatever you want to call it."

She waited, silent.

"It seems like when I get what I want, it's taken away from me," he said, groping for words. "I was having a swell time overseas."

"Killing people?"

He looked at her. "Killing German combat pilots," he admitted.

"And was that a glorious thing to do?"

"It was a very necessary thing. Kill or get killed. Or let them have the sky, so they could direct artillery, against civilian back areas, perhaps. All the fighting and destruction occurred in France and Belgium, you noticed."

"War hate!"

"Maybe. I wonder. Maybe it's a fear of the hatreds that are over there in Europe. Dating back generations. Bred in their bones." He shook his head. "We didn't end wars, Trick. Sometimes I think it was a mistake, going over there at all. Do you know that the Germans already have an air force started?"

"That's against the Versailles Treaty!"

"Nevertheless, they're already building up a military air force. And they've published new, complete regulations for the employment of aircraft in the army."

"Do Great Britain and France know that?"

"It's public knowledge. Queer thing is, Trick, they're using money borrowed from us to do it. And to build military roads." He shook his head in bewilderment. "Do you realize that during the war we indirectly helped Germany against ourselves, by sending Red Cross food and supplies to people in conquered, German-occupied territory? The Germans stripped the land bare to feed their own people. Then we fed the people they victimized."

"It does seem foolish, doesn't it?"

"Mark this, Trick. There'll be another war over there. And next time they'll take it as a matter of course that the United States should feed and clothe all the people in conquered territory. That'll leave 'em free to take everything for their fighting forces. What soft-hearted, soft-brained fools we are!"

SHE grimaced. "Let's forget wars. It'll be a hundred years before they're in shape for another one." She paused, waiting for him to resume the former conversation. "You were saying that whenever you got something, it was taken away from you," she prompted.

"Trick, you know when we took off

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from here, after we'd made such a fool of old Bert Tallerand?" He grinned, wryly. "Well, Trick, I was just having the time of my life. And the idea of barnstorming with you, out to Idaho—I was all set to do that. I wasn't going to leave you at Salt Lake, like I said."

She smiled. "I was pretty sure you wouldn't, Dan."

"You seem to understand me, Trick," he mused. "Better than I understand myself."

"Sometimes I do. Sometimes, I don't understand you at all."

"Well, anyway," he concluded bitterly. "It's all over now. I caused you to be cheated, paying Tallerand nine hundred and fifty for that crate. Then I wrecked it for you." He motioned with his right hand. "And look at this swell room. It'll cost every cent I have, an' a whole lot more to pay for it."

She looked at him curiously. "Who do you think Jake Regan is?" she asked.

"A miner; coal miner. That's what I understood, anyway."

"He *owns* the mine," she said, and watched his face.

"He—the devil he does!"

"Yes, ivory-dome. And when Mrs. Regan learned you were injured she ordered the best room in the place for you. And the best medical attention, regardless of cost." She put her hand on his arm. "Dan, you don't seem to realize what you did! Why—why the people around here talk about you as though you were a saint."

His smile grew to sudden laughter. "Me! A saint! I'd like to see you tell Capt'n Pat I'm a saint."

She grew serious. "Dan, what would you do if you had an unlimited amount of money and wanted to buy a new airplane? I mean, what kind would you buy?"

"For barnstorming? I—that's easy, Trick. I'd buy a Wason. They're putting out the best commercial job in the country."

"That's a Kansas factory?"

"Yeah. It's a beauty, that ship. Costs something like eight thousand, though."

"I told him a good one would cost a lot." She nodded.

"You—what're you talking about, Trick?"

"I mean," she told him with a composed smile, "that Mr. Regan wants to get you an airplane—the best commercial plane you can buy."

CHAPTER XXI

FLY GREASE

DAN MOORE stopped the taxicab driver. "What's that?" he asked. He was peering out the window.

The driver sniffed. "That's the slaughterhouse. Smells like hell, don't it?"

"I mean that big shed over there, with the airplane in front of it."

"That. Oh, that's the McCulley brothers. Crazier'n bedbugs, them two. That's what they call their factory."

"Drive me in. I want to see the ship."

"Thought you wanted to go out to the Wason factory?"

"That don't stop me wanting to see a plane along the way, does it? An airplane like that one."

Dan left the taxicab, walked over and stood looking at the ship. He was chewing his lower lip. His face mirrored conflicting emotions: admiration and annoyance.

"Two-place job," he muttered. "Plenty wing-loading there." He moved to the nose of the plane. "Liberty engine. Too much power; too much weight." He examined the landing gear struts. "No spreader bar. Wouldn't that be sweet, landing in tall grass?" He shook his head. "Won't stand up, though."

"Why won't it?"

"Steel struts—" He turned, aware suddenly that he was arguing with a strange voice. He faced a blocky little man with a worried, unshaven face.

"Why won't they stand up?" the man asked.

"Tubular steel—no give to it, no resilience."

"If you want resilience, why don't you

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build an airplane out of rubber? There's shock cord inside those tubings. Shock cord, and an air cylinder to take the final impact of landing."

"That's an idea!" Then Moore shook his head. "But steel's no good around ships. You've got to have resilience. And wood's the only way to get it."

"Like hell! We'll be building the whole ship out of steel before we're through. Anyway, the frame work."

"They're a lot of nuts in Europe who think the same thing. The Junkers outfit, Tony Fokker, and others. But that's because they can't get good spruce."

Another man had come out, a replica of the first. "What do you know about it?" he demanded.

"I'm an airplane pilot," Dan told them. "I flew overseas."

The two men exchanged glances. The first man spoke, in a changed voice: "I'm Bob McCulley," he said. "This here's Taver, my brother."

Dan gave his name, shook hands with them.

"How many hours you got?" Bob asked.

"Eighteen hundred and forty-six hours," Dan said, and watched them blink at that astronomical figure; watched the doubt come into their faces. "And it's mostly Army, an' here's my log book." He pulled his log book out of his side coat pocket and watched them go through it. "And here's my A.P. book; my picture, with the U. S. seal punched on it; just in case you think I swiped that log book some place."

They studied the documents. There was suppressed eagerness in Taver McCulley's voice. "You looking for a testpilot job?" he asked.

Moore shook his head. "I was on my way out to the Wason factory. Brought that log book along so they'd let me try out one of their commercial jobs—the Wright 150. May buy one."

"It's a good ship," Taver allowed, his face settling into dour lines of disappointment. "Well," he added, to his brother, "Guess you're right. Bit off more'n we can chew."

Bob McCulley rubbed his fingers over the lacquered wingtip of the plane. They were the blackened, cracked fingers of a man who has done a lot of gas welding. "Yeah," he agreed. "Guess they were all correct, when they named us crazy." He gave a short, bitter laugh. "Spend all we got an' go into debt, to build a ship that will never fly."

Dan felt his own judgment affronted. "The hell she won't fly," he defended the airplane. "May be a little fast an' a little tricky. But she'll fly."

"Who said she wouldn't fly! But we haven't any two hundred dollars to pay a good test pilot. An' we're not letting any fifty-hour kiwi smash her up. It'll take a real pilot to fly that ship."

MOORE looked at them; looked at the sleek, streamlined plane. He'd never seen a ship like that before. You could just look at the easy, swinging curves of her and actually feel the air flow over them, without turbulance, without that tremendous resistance of the DeHaviland, the S.E.5; even the very latest of military craft.

"You spoiled it, though, with that landing gear," Moore complained. "Wheels too far apart, no spreader bar, steel struts."

Bob McCulley spat disgustedly. "Wheels too far apart! Think we got to have them standard gauge, like a wagon? So they'll fit in the road ruts? An' we don't need any spread bar because that tubular steel won't side-buckle, like spruce."

Taver McCulley waved a five-dollar bill under Dan's nose. "See that rough field out there?" he demanded. "This five spot says you can't taxi it across there fast enough to cave that gear."

"I'll make it ten dollars," Moore countered, "against you taking me out to the Wason factory—after I've busted your ship up out there, and take me back to town when I'm ready."

Forty minutes later he handed Taver McCulley two five-dollar bills. "Damned if I know how you did it," he said, "but that's the strongest gear I ever rode on.

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Why don't you two show that crate to the Army?"

"We have, on the ground," Taver said, swiping at the flies that swarmed from the nearby slaughterhouse. "There's some Air Service officers at the Wason plant now, scouting around for new stuff. But Army regulations won't allow them to fly tests. And we can't pay for a good test pilot."

"You know," Dan mused, "I lifted her off the ground once, out there. Just a foot or two, before I cut the gun."

He walked around the plane, the two brothers following him. "FG," he read the large, black lettering on the rudder. "What's that stand for?"

Taver laid his hand on the fuselage turtleback and watched the flies collect to sample the perspiration. "Well," he explained, face dead serious, "Bob an' I've been crazy about airplanes ever since the Wrights flew, in 1903. Built models, built gliders; tried to build a man-sized plane, for a Ford engine.

"Learned a lot of things in that time. Then we put everything we'd learned and everything we owned into this ship. And during most of that time working out here, we've smelled that damned slaughterhouse an' been drove crazy by these damn flies."

He paused. "Look at 'em! Those flies on my hand. If you could build a pursuit ship with their performance you'd have the whole world beat. So," he concluded, "when we finished this ship we caught up a half-gallon of those flies. Put 'em in a can of water an' boiled 'em. Skimmed the top off the water an' rubbed it all over this ship—wings, struts, everything."

He looked at Dan with his solemn Scotchman's eyes. "So that's what we named her. FG—Fly Grease."

Dan's face matched the Scotchman's in gravity. "And the more that grease you rub on the better she flies, eh?"

"Sounds reasonable, don't it?"

Dan pulled on his helmet. "I'm crazy, too," he chuckled. "Let's get that Liberty started. We'll see how much good the fly grease did."

They got busy.

THE field was too short for small trial hops, a few feet off the ground, to feel out the controls. He would have to take it off the first time, prepared to circle the field or crack up. If it was structurally weak—wing section bad, relation of center-of-pressure to center-of-gravity wrong, control surfaces too small, or anyone of a thousand other things faulty—he would crack up.

Unconsciously he rubbed the V-shaped scar over his right eye. It was still tender. It was a wonder his skull hadn't been fractured in that last crash.

He turned into the wind at the end of the field. He sat quietly for a time, staring unseeingly at the sixty-degree banks of the twelve cylinder Liberty, listening to its uneven, throaty mutter. That was the way it should sound. It was a new engine, just uncrated and run in. He wasn't afraid of it quitting.

But the wing section bothered him—its shape. There were a number of conventional wing sections that had been thoroughly wind-tunnel tested. He didn't recognize these wings as shaped like any of them. They were much thicker and with very little camber of the lower surface.

He was putting a lot of trust in those two sour-faced Scotchmen. If the wing section was faulty things would happen immediately after he lifted off the ground and got full flying speed. Things that would be beyond his control. Like one of the toy gliders that boys throw into the air, it might go into a steep dive or a steep climb. He would crash nose in or go up into a vertical stall, slip down tail-first with the Liberty on top of him.

His eyes were scanning the instrument board; oil pressure, water temperature, gas-feed pressure, charge rate. His hands moved about the cockpit. Radiator shutters open, altitude adjustment to Full Rich, stabilizer a little forward of neutral, safety belt snug and fastened.

He was without parachute. In this first flight a parachute wouldn't be much good anyway.

He gave quick jabs to the throttle then, slowly, pushed it wide open and shoved

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forward on the joy stick. "All right, Fly Grease," he muttered, "do your stuff."

He held wheels to the ground as long as he could. The more speed he had before lifting off the better chance for control, if there was a faulty c.p. travel of the wings. He was waiting for something to happen, something that had *seemed* to happen when he lifted the wheels off a few inches the first time, when he was trying the landing gear.

By rights he should be out at the Wason factory right now. There was no reason in the world why he should be risking his neck with this crate. He hoped, if something went wrong, that he'd be killed instantly. There had been too many broken bones and wounds; too much hospitalization in his life. And he'd rather be dead than paralyzed, or with an arm or leg crushed so that it would have to be chopped off.

In a way this thing wasn't fair to Trick Hoyt. When he left her at the hotel the understanding was that he would test the Wason, and the next day they would leave for Idaho. The Wason would be Trick's plane, of course, since she had owned the other one that had been crashed in flying Jake Regan to the hospital. He would turn it over to the Hoyts when he and Trick arrived in Idaho. He could leave then without feeling obligated to them in any way.

THE FG's wheels had started bouncing, despite the high angle of tail. He nudged back on the control stick. The thing he was waiting for happened: a sudden forward surge that pushed him back in the seat, snapped his helmet against the headrest. The FG seemed to fling itself into the air, like a bird suddenly released.

He had never flown a plane like this, though he'd handled every type employed by the U. S. and most of the French and English ships. That is, all of them but the GAX, the new attack plane, that horrible confusion of armor plate and guns, that would scarcely lift off the ground.

Handling the stick with delicate fingers, he climbed, flying straight ahead. His right hand moved the stick very lightly to the side. The left wing dipped. He moved it to the right, and the plane heeled to that side. Aileron controls were all right, it seemed.

He tried rudder, then elevator, moving the stick forward to a mild gliding angle and back for a slight climb. They functioned perfectly. But would they do so in a stall? That was the important question.

His fingers slackened back a little on the throttle. He worked altitude adjustment to get best r.p.m.'s.

The first turns were shallow-banked. They grew steeper, but never approaching vertical.

This all took time, and a tremendous concentration of faculties. His whole body was alert every instant, to detect a flaw in the ship's performance.

The altimeter, set at zero before he left the ground, now showed three thousand feet. He hadn't been aware of climbing at all.

His right hand moved to the radiator shutters, half-closing them. His left eased the throttle clear back. He wet his dry lips. This would tell him how much she could be trusted.

Stick and rudder controls slacked with lessened air pressure. There was the feel of a fast-descending elevator. The tail shivered very slightly as she stalled.

He moved the stick to right and left. Obediently the wings canted to right and left. His tight-pressed lips curved upwards at the corners. He tried the elevator controls, the rudder. The FG was like a high-spirited horse, feeling the bit pressure in her tender mouth.

Dan turned back, slanting toward the field for a landing. His smile had grown to a deep, satisfied chuckle. The McCulley brothers met him at the edge of the field, and trotted back, one to each wing tip, helping to guide him.

He climbed out and met their questioning faces. "Get your Army boys out here tomorrow morning," he instructed them.

Taver said, "You understand that we have no money to pay you."

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Moore nodded. "You'll have to drive me back in town."

He saw the eager questions in their faces. This plane was a fulfillment of years of work and study. How had it climbed? How had it answered to controls? Was it really what they thought—an exceptional plane, far ahead of ordinary designs?"

Moore pointed at the broad door of their workshed, grinning at the brothers. "If you two'll bolt an engine to that door an' rub some of your fly grease on it, I'll take that up for the Army, too."

That was their answer. They knew instinctively that Dan Moore was an artist in his profession. And he was satisfied—more than satisfied.

CHAPTER XXII

LIEUTENANT HEEL

TRICK rode out to the field with Dan the next morning, in a taxicab. He was silent. He had been unusually silent last night at dinner.

She had asked him questions about this plane he was going to test. She wasn't greatly surprised that he was flying the tests, risking his life, for no pay. Why he did these things she couldn't understand. It seemed that he had a consuming thirst for danger, for the excitement that comes with danger.

He had told her very little about the ship. It was a two-place, Liberty-powered biplane. That was about all he had to say. But there was something about the way he spoke of it; a quality of eagerness, of wistfulness—it was hard to define, and harder to understand.

The McCulley brothers had their ship out, early as it was, and had the engine warmed up. They had borrowed a parachute from the Wason factory.

"The captain and lieutenant'll be out here directly," Bob told Moore. "We talked with them last night. Here's a list of what they'll want to see her do."

Moore took the list of required maneuvers. His lips were tightly compressed, his mouth grim. Trick had been watching him. A sharp twitch, as though of pain, moved his lips when Bob mentioned the officers.

The old wound was still there, raw and bleeding. Ostensibly Moore was still a lieutenant in the U. S. Air Service, temporarily separated on leave of absence. But that was only until his court-martial sentence had gone through the red tape of review channels. Right now, to all intents and purposes, he was disgraced, thrown out of the Service.

Her mind reviewed the past as she watched him shrug his shoulders into the back straps of the parachute.

Through the clever scheming of Captain Nagel, Moore had been blamed for that crash of Alfred Best; for the death of four men. And then he had been court-martialed for striking a superior officer.

He must hate Nagel, Trick thought. I don't blame him. I wouldn't blame him if he killed Nagel, on sight!

A taxicab swung off the road, coming to a stop. Two men in officers' uniforms stepped from it.

Dan was in the FG's cockpit, waiting. The four-hundred-horsepower Liberty snorted under the goading throttle. Moore taxied slowly, zigzagging, out to the lee end of the field. The growl of the engine changed to deep thunder.

Trick heard a part of what the captain had been saying: "And you'd have to slim up that fuselage. Too wide for . . ."

She moved nearer them. They were too busy watching the plane to notice her.

IT HAD already grown small with altitude. It seeded like a toy, jerked about in quick, sharp maneuvers. But she knew enough about flying to realize the wracking strains and stresses that were being put on the machine. Was it Dan Moore up there, the man who was deliberately trying to pull that airplane to pieces? It seemed impossible.

"He does a smooth Immelmann turn," the lieutenant remarked.

"Smooth Immelmann!" the captain growled. "That fella does everything smooth." He turned to one of the Mc-

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Culleys. "Who's your test pilot, mister?"

"He's going to spin her now," Taver said, nervously.

"With that tail design there's a good chance of auto-rotation—flat spin. God help him if he gets into one of those!"

But he didn't. Trick was praying under her breath, hands tightly clenched. A left spin and a right. Then clocking his top speed over the designated markers.

It was a bare speck now, so high that the engine sound came as faint murmur. It twisted over on its back. The nose pointed earthward. Down . . . down . . . down!

"Dive to terminal velocity!" the captain exclaimed. "If she keeps her wings in the pull-out, you've sold Uncle Sam an airplane. A lot of airplanes, if my recommendations are worth anything."

The engine's sound was like the ripping of dry, tough canvas. If the wings held on! If they didn't, if they were jerked loose with the terrific strain, his parachute wouldn't be much help. At that critical moment he'd be momentarily unconscious, blood drained from his head by centrifugal force.

With a choked, sobbing cry, Trick Hoyt covered her eyes with both hands.

There was a final crash of sound.

"Boys," the captain said, not trying to hide his excitement, "I'd like to shake hands with you. I can almost assure you a contract, if you want to meet our specifications."

Trick looked up. The FG was coming in on a lazy glide. The test was over.

The brothers were protesting something that the officers had told them: "But you won't take this plane?"

"No. We'll want your engineering data. After studying it we'll send you Air Service specifications and a tentative contract."

The brothers exchanged glances. "Everything we own, and everything we could borrow, is right in that ship, Captain!" Taver McCulley protested. "Close to eight thousand dollars, not even counting our work."

"You mean," the captain demanded, "that you can't get backing?"

Again the two brothers exchanged glances. There wasn't much hope in Taver's voice. "We'll try, Captain."

"Good! And now, I'd like to meet your pilot. That was the finest bit of flying that I've seen in many a day."

Trick was not prepared for what followed. She reproached herself later for not thinking of what might happen. For not doing something to avert it. Nagel had had ample time to broadcast his version of Best's crash.

They moved to the plane as it taxied up, and Moore cut the switches and climbed out, standing awkwardly, with the parachute dragging at his back.

There was a broad smile on the captain's face, a smile of admiration. His hand was extended.

Taver McCulley said, "Mr. Moore, I'd like to have you meet—"

Cold anger sounded in the captain's voice as he interrupted. "Daniel Moore?"

Dan nodded, watching the captain, his eyes seeming to plead with him. "Yes, Daniel Moore," he said quietly. "Formerly of the U. S. Air Service."

The captain's hand had dropped, his face hard with contempt. He whirled, and with the lieutenant beside him, walked stiffly toward his waiting cab.

DAN MOORE sat, cold and stiff and remote, in his corner of the taxicab. His face was blank of expression, his eyes staring ahead, unseeing. "It wouldn't do any good to kill Nagel," he said, thinking aloud. "But I'll have to do something. I—"

"Don't think of it, Dan. There's no good in brooding over it."

"No," he agreed. "But . . . it's with me all the time, Trick. Always there. Always hanging over me. And it always will be, while Nagel lives and spreads his lies."

She forced cheerfulness into her voice. "Do you remember that two hundred dollars you gave me, Dan?"

"Part payment on that nine hundred and fifty you gave Tallerand?"

"Full payment, Dan. Read this." She handed him a slip of paper.

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"This is a bill of sale!"

"For Tallerand's airplane," she nodded.

"But I don't understand, Trick. He said you gave him nine hundred and fifty dollars."

She smiled into his face. "Remember, there in the jail? You said it wasn't worth more than two hundred and fifty dollars. I'd already heard things about Tallerand and his airplane. And I'm a pretty good judge of character. Do you understand now?"

"No. No, I don't, Trick."

"If there was one thing that worm was proud of, it was in being a shrewd, sharp trader. *He* was the one who always cheated the other fellow. But the tables had been turned on him in the case of that airplane. He'd been cheated and made ridiculous before the whole community.

"Well," she concluded, "I gave the little weasel a chance to crawl out and save his face. I gave him two hundred dollars for the plane and let him announce to all the people of Alcova and Selma that I'd given him nine hundred and fifty. That made me look like the fool, and saved his reputation for shrewdness."

"Then—"

"Then, Mr. Moore, you gave *me* two hundred dollars. If you'll notice, this bill of sale is endorsed by me over to you. It was *your* ship that you cracked up that night with Jake Regan."

He looked at her, with a slowly forming smile. If that first plane belonged to him, then the money, the nine-thousand-dollar check that Jake Regan had given him, was his, too. That must be what he was thinking.

But, as so often happened, his mental processes eluded her entirely. There was a relieved note in his laughter. His voice was apologetic. "D'you remember the night you asked me for that two hundred dollars? That was almost all the money I had, Trick."

Her face warmed with embarrassment and annoyance. He had kissed her that night.

He read her thoughts. "I was punishing you for being such a cold-blooded little pirate," he explained.

"Well, you know now that I wasn't cold-blooded," she snapped. "I was being a whole lot nicer than you deserved."

But she couldn't hold anger against him, knowing of the deep bitterness that Alvin Nagel had caused him.

"Dan," she spoke, in a softer voice, "you're going to own that FG."

He frowned at her. "Are you crazy!" he demanded. "Those boys didn't have enough money even to pay me for the test flying."

She nodded wisely. "That's the very reason why you'll own it. I heard the Army officers talking. The design will have to be modified considerably. That leaves the McCulleys holding the FG, and without money to build the new type. If I'm a good guesser, they'll jump at the chance to sell the FG for the material they have in it—eight thousand dollars."

HE WAS silent for a long time. She watched the changing expressions of his face. "You're crazy about that ship, aren't you, Dan?" she asked, softly.

He looked at her, the corners of his eyes wrinkling with cynical amusement; amusement at himself. "Yes, crazy," he admitted. "I'm a fool for a ship like that, Trick. It's—it's like a thoroughbred racehorse." His smile hardened. "Yes," he added, "like a thoroughbred racehorse, when what you need is a steady-going plow animal, like that Wason 150."

She motioned impatiently. "Haven't you gotten it through your head yet that I didn't own that other plane? That I haven't any interest in the next plane you buy? And as far as that's concerned," she hurried on, "that FG will make a good passenger ship and stunt ship, too. Which is just what a barnstormer needs."

He wasn't hard to convince. Not with him loving the FG as he did. "You're determined to make a barnstormer of me, aren't you, Trick?"

"Well, you tried other work. There in Alcova. Were you happy there?"

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"No," he admitted. "Once a fool, always a fool. Once a flyer, always a flyer."

"Why do you have to talk like that!" she exclaimed. "You don't have to be a crazy daredevil to fly. Not the way Red has it figured out."

"No," he admitted, "you don't have to be crazy to fly, Trick. But it helps a lot." He shrugged. "Let's not go into that old argument again."

She nodded ready agreement. There was no use arguing. To him airplanes were good only as war weapons, to be used with a reckless disregard of safety. It seemed that he never would recognize their other possibilities.

"If we can buy that plane tomorrow," she asked, "would you be willing to fly straight on to Idaho—to Craig Point?"

"Sure," he agreed. "Sure I would."

She leaned back in the car seat, with a half audible sigh of relief. After all, she was going to be able to keep her promises. Promises made to her brother, and to Capt'n Pat and Mike Deniski.

ON THE basis of those promises Captain Patrick, Dan's overseas buddy, had resigned his commission in the Air Service. And Mike Deniski, whose enlistment had expired a month before, had joined her brother, turning his back on the Army, on the promise of sergeant's stripes.

She wondered at this blind loyalty to Moore. But of course, those two men had been overseas with him. Back at the army field in Florida, Captain Patrick had told her: "Without Dan the Air Service won't ever be the same to me. An' with all this safety-first talk, wouldn't be no time 'fore I'd get my walkin' papers. You get Dan to head an air circus an' I'll be right there, flyin' with him."

The more wonder was the confidence that her brother had in him. Yes, and her own confidence, despite the fact that she didn't approve of his ideas, or his conduct; that she didn't approve of him at all.

Well, her worries were over now. Red had been buying planes, hiring pilots, getting the air circus assembled. She would bring Dan Moore to them, as she had promised. He might not like it at first. But with Capt'n Pat and Mike Deniski there, he couldn't very well avoid joining with them; taking charge of the flying. With all his faults, he had a strong sense of duty.

She hadn't realized the burden of worry that had been on her. Walking into the hotel lobby, she put her arm through his. "The way I feel, Dan, I want to celebrate. D'you suppose there's some place we could go tonight, where we could dance?"

"I 'spect so, Trick. Pretty yourself up a little an' we'll cruise around and find out." He was smiling down into her face. But his eyes were sober, still carrying the hurt of the brutal snubbing he had gotten out at the McCulley field. That and the realization that his whole past had been dirtied and made unbearable by Alvin Nagel.

"Telegram, Miss Hoyt," the clerk said, handing her the yellow envelope.

"Excuse me, Dan," she said, tearing it open. The telegram must be from Red, her brother. Wouldn't he be excited and pleased when she wired that they were coming immediately! And once she had gotten Dan back there with Pat, and surrounded by new friends, he would forget Nagel. He would be busy organizing the circus and there would be nothing to remind him of the past.

She spread the folded message:

ALVIN NAGEL ARRIVED TODAY. OWNS NEW FOUR-PLACE MONOPLANE. INSISTS WE CANNOT KEEP HIM FROM TRAILING ALONG WITH CIRCUS. PAT SAYS BRING DAN ALONG AND LET THEM HAVE IT OUT.

RED

A key slapped on the hotel desk. "I'll go up and get into some civilized clothes, Trick," Dan said. "Then we'll find that dance."

His words seemed to come from a great distance. Yes, she had suggested that they dance. Because she was so happy. Because all her worries were over.

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She stood for a moment, half-turned from him, trying to regain her poise, wondering if she could trust herself to speak.

He frowned at her long silence. "What's the matter, Trick? Bad news?"

She took a deep breath, turned, facing him, "Yes," she said, "bad news."

"You don't mean—Trick, has Red been flying?"

"No, Dan. It concerns you." She was oblivious of the listening desk clerk. "Dan, I've—I've made a terrible mess of things. I . . ." She looked desperately about the room. "Is there some place we can talk, Dan? Where we can be alone?"

CHAPTER XXIII

DANGEROUS CIRCUS

ANTELOPE ISLAND shoved its rocky back out of the flat, glaring expanse of Salt Lake, drifting to the rear as they climbed. The long finger of Promontory Point was to their right.

That, Trick remembered, was where the golden spike had been driven into the joining iron of the trans-continental railroad. It had been a great day in American history when those two sections were joined. The whole continent spanned by rails; regular train service from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.

The thought heartened her. Hadn't the world always been skeptical of new things? Hadn't laughter and derision greeted the idea of people being carried in steam-drawn coaches?

And now they were flying over the realization of that dream, covering space at the unbelievable speed of a hundred miles an hour. Yes, faster than that with this FG. And her brother, Red, was dreaming of transporting people by air. Not just short joy hops or special charter trips, but regular scheduled air transport, running nights as well as days; flying in all kinds of weather.

She frowned, her mind balking at that. She had been too long with Dan Moore, who scoffed at the dream; who claimed that the instrument flying necessary for it was an impossibility. He and other experienced airmen, like that Joe Grout, a mountain division pilot on the new trans-continental airmail service. They had been talking with him just a short time before, on the Salt Lake City airmail field.

Her depression returned. They were approaching the black, towering wall of the Raft River mountains. To the east the wall broke abruptly in a pass that would let them into the Snake River valley. Every minute brought nearer the meeting between Dan Moore and Alvin Nagel.

She recalled the feeling of hopeless anger that she had experienced in reading the telegram from her brother. Why had Nagel intruded himself? What was his object?

Pat and Red must not realize the seriousness of the quarrel between Moore and Nagel. They thought it better that the two men meet and have it out. That was characteristic of Pat. A good fist fight, and that would be the end of it.

To her surprise, Dan had agreed that they should go on and join the circus. Not that the quarrel could ever end as simply as Pat thought. But it was better to have Nagel around where he could be watched.

THAT evening at the hotel she had confessed everything to Moore. She told him about the airplanes Red had already purchased for the circus, about Patrick and Mike Deniski leaving the Air Service to join them, about her own deceptions in bringing him this far, and about Nagel forcing himself into the circus.

"He's planning something, Dan," she warned. "And we can't keep him from following the circus. For some reason he hates you; hates you so terribly that only his death or yours will end it."

Dan had told her then, for the first time, of how he and Nagel had gone up in an airplane to four thousand feet and put it into a tailspin. To see which one had the most courage; to see who would be the first one to pull out of the death maneuver. And it had been Nagel who, at the last minute, lost his nerve.

A few months before she wouldn't have believed it possible that two grown-up,

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normal men could do a thing so fantastically mad. She still couldn't understand it, though she could believe it now, having seen Dan Moore do other things just as insane. Fools who fly. That was the way he referred to himself and to anyone who flew. And that seemed the general attitude toward flying.

"I think Pat's right, in a way," Moore had said, after a long, thoughtful silence. "It is better for me to be around Nagel, so I can watch him. And it seems that the only way this can end is in the death of one or maybe both of us."

"But, Dan!" she exclaimed, "he'll do something. He'll fix your plane so it will wreck!"

"No," Moore shook his head. "No, he's not that kind, Trick. He must have his vengeance in his own way. That much I know about him—though I don't understand it, don't understand how his mind works. Did Red tell you how he happened to get out of the Army?"

Her voice was contemptuous. "It was in a card game, with other officers. There was a quarrel over something and he shot one of them. At least he fired at him. Missed."

Dan nodded. "Yeah. When he loses his temper he goes plumb crazy. I saw it one time. That's what he did that day I challenged him to the tailspin."

"Dan," she had asked him, "if we go on to Craig Point and he is still there, will you be able to control yourself? After seeing what that officer did to you there at McCulley's field, I wouldn't blame you in the least for shooting Nagel in his tracks."

He laughed at that. "Hell, Trick, I can't hate people. Guess I'm just too goodnatured dumb for that. I can't even hate Nagel very hard or very long at a stretch."

THE deep squirming gash of Snake River canyon was to their left now. It parted abruptly westward from their course. That must be Glenn's Ferry, she thought, studying the Rand McNally map that Dan had given her. It was right on the penciled course line that he had drawn.

She wondered, as she had so often wondered during the last few days, how he held so true to that course. Their compass was disturbed by the magnetic influences that surrounded it in the plane. But he seemed to have a homing instinct, or, rather, the instinct that guides the birds in their seasonal flights.

Her feeling of dread increased. Dan had said that he wouldn't seek a fight with Nagel. But what if Nagel started the fight? Dan couldn't avoid it then. And with his anger aroused there would come the memories of what the other man had done to him. And Dan Moore was big; was terribly strong. She had the horrible feeling that he could kill a man with his bare fists.

There was a good-sized town to their right—a city. She tried to identify it on her map. It was Boise. She could see the capitol building.

Her hands were tight-clenched with the nervous tension. They would be there in a few minutes now. They would be there and landing. Nagel might come walking out to meet them; might say exactly the wrong thing. And then . . .

"THIS air circus," Moore told the pilots and mechanics he had called together in the hotel banquet room, "is owned by Julian Hoyt and his sister. That is, with the exception of my plane, the FG, and Alvin Nagel's, the two-engine Elly cabin ship.

"All financial matters will be handled by Julian Hoyt and his sister. Mike Deniski will be in charge of maintenance. I'm to be in charge of flying, a sort of operations officer. Are there any questions about that?"

Dan Moore resumed, after a pause: "We will have as few rules as possible. What you do when you're not flying is entirely your own concern; not my business at all. But there will be no drinking on the days you fly. Any objections to that?"

Nagel cleared his throat. He was seated at the back of the room, immaculate in bleached Bedford breeches, pale tan chamois jacket and highly polished flying boots.

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Trick Hoyt jerked nervously in her chair. He was going to say something. And it might be the wrong thing.

She had been there the evening before when the two came together. That was after a boisterous, back-pounding meeting between Dan and Pat and Mike Deniski. Moore and Nagel had eyed each other for a silent, wary interval, like cat and dog, carefully holding themselves in control.

"Hello, Moore."

"Hello, Nagel."

That was all. As though they had barely met, as though those terrible things in the past had never occurred. Nagel had walked on by with his quick, springy stride toward his new, four-place cabin plane.

Nagel was smiling now, leaning back in his chair. His blond, wax-spiked mustache heightened the insolence in his good-looking face.

"Do you have some objections, Nagel?" Moore asked in a soft drawl.

"Just a comment regarding that drinking rule." Nagel smiled. "I've seen you fly when you were so drunk you couldn't hit your home state with a frying pan."

Moore's lips answered Nagel's smile. "And I may do it again," he said. "Understand," he spoke to the others, "this isn't an apron-strings rule. It's not to safe-guard the drinker's life. Not in the least. It's because we haven't any extra ships to be cracked up. And it's to protect the men flying in the same formations.

"I want to make that very clear," he went on. "Flying is always dangerous business, but this is going to be especially dangerous. We're going to do tight formations, stunts in formation, if possible, and dog fights. We're going to give our crowds a real show. If there's anybody here who doesn't like that kind of flying, he'd better speak up right now."

Trick saw the eager, devil-may-care smiles come to their faces. They all knew Moore's record. They were all proud to know that he expected them to match him in recklessness. And it seemed to Trick that they were so terribly young; just boys, most of them.

ALL EYES shifted to a small, black-haired youth as Dan resumed. "Jackson," he said. "You'd never flown a rotary engined ship before you came here, had you?"

"I've been practicing with one of the Thomas Morse scouts for the last couple days," the boy defended himself.

"Yes. I saw you when I came in yesterday. Trying to loop, weren't you?"

"Those darned things're hard to loop, Lieutenant."

"Just drop that title. I'd like to have all of you call me Dan."

The whole room turned at Nagel's sharp, derisive laugh.

"What's the joke, Nagel?" Moore's voice was icy, challenging.

"Me? Oh, nothing. Just thought of a funny story."

I'll have to talk to him, Trick thought. He'll have to stop that sort of thing, or leave the circus.

"You try to loop those T.M's.," Jackson complained, "an' they want to do a right barrel roll."

"That's the rotary motor; its gyroscopic effect. The cylinders whirl around a fixed crankshaft. You can get an idea of that effect by holding a bicycle wheel in front of you, axle horizontal, pointing straight ahead. Give it a good hard whirl, then try to swing it up over your head, so that the axis is vertical. If you've never tried it before you'll be surprised at the way it resists that swing."

"How d'you loop them, then, Lieutenant —I mean Dan?"

"Increasing left rudder as you come up. But I'd suggest you stay away from loops with them. Too easy to fall into an outside spin and too hard to get out of it.

"Another thing, if you haven't already flown one. As you know, the air and gas is drawn into the crankcase and compressed there. That's why they have to be lubricated with castor oil, which isn't soluble in gasoline. As a result of this mixing system there's an interval of a second to five seconds between the time you use the mixing throttles and when the engine reacts to

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them. And they're hell for groundlooping."

"I'll say they are!" Jackson affirmed.

"So you've got to give a little jab on your mixing throttles just before the wheels touch, to get your propeller blast in time to steady out of the groundloop—the quick swerve on the ground. Otherwise you'll snag a wing tip.

"And that is something I want to emphasize," Moore said, voice hardening, "we've got six Thomas Morse scouts, the remodeled Curtis with that Sperry high-lift wing and a Hall-Scott Standard, the last on its way up here now. Those and Nagel's and my ship. You can see we haven't any equipment to spare. And we won't have facilities for much maintenance work. Keep that in mind, every minute of the time you're flying. Be careful of your equipment!"

A chair scraped in the rear. Nagel's jeering voice centered all eyes on him. "What right have you got, telling these boys to be careful?" he demanded. He was standing, his narrowed eyes ranging the others' faces. He pointed at Moore. "That man never made a careful flight in his whole life," he accused, his voice raised angrily.

Trick Hoyt had risen. There was a falseness in Nagel's anger. This was a pretense, a deliberate effort to start a quarrel.

It might be successful.

Dan Moore had been sprawled comfortably in a chair, one booted leg crooked over its arm. His foot came to the floor now, his hands moved to each arm of the chair, to raise himself. The movements were slow, deliberate. He was like a crouching animal.

Trick's throat seemed caught in a terrible grip. "Pat!" she choked, "stop them! Stop them!"

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Pepino the bull watched Mase and the Bessie-cow perform their violent antics

Hold That Bull

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

Author of "Palmetto Gold," "Tiger Hammock," etc.

Jigger Key's a peaceful spot until that devilin' Mase McKay stirs things up. But Mase as a combination picador and cow-buster was something the swamp folk were not prepared to see

A BULL fight at Jigger Key in the deep Florida glades was regarded suspiciously by the swamp-folk as just another scheme of that devilin' Mase McKay. They were skeptical still even when Señor Roberto Lupe and young Blink Curley, the Miami promoter, jolted in from the Key West highway with a racehorse van that they had unofficially borrowed from the Tropical Park track.

It was last week that Blink had met Mase and confided that the *señor* had to get his bull out of Miami before the sheriff seized it for unpaid feedbills along with the other wreckage of a busted carnival. This carnival had been Blink's first promotion job; and it had closed too soon.

Mase told them that if they could sneak their bull down to Jigger Town he'd put on a show that would raise enough cash to get the critter safely back to Havana—he hoped.

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But Blink and Lupe didn't know that Mase had been advertising a genuine Spanish bullfight and when they heard that, coupled with the rumors of a barbecue to follow, they went hot-foot to the McKay General Store, filled with unkind thoughts.

"Hey, guy," Blink Curley yelled. "What's this a kid tells us about you promising people a barbecue this evening to wind up your fiesta?"

"But, no!" Señor Lupe screeched. "Eat my bull? No—no!"

"Shucks," said Mase easily. "Don't git hot. I couldn't git public int'rest 'roused up until I promised 'em somethin' to eat. Grub is surefire hokum in politics, ain't it? So I jest handed out a line to git 'em comin' to town."

"Eat ze bull?" moaned the *señor*. "What outrage! My Pepino— it ees the joke!" Blink gestured the apprehensive Cuban to silence.

"Yes, but telling a lot of tough swampers that?" protested Blink. "They'll skin *us* when they find you've gypped them!"

Mase grinned. "Yeh. I thought of that. It might git us all some grief. So I modified the statement some. Them two cowboys are bringing in their rodeo-trained steer to battle the *señor's* bull, so I jest announced that the animal that gits licked goes into rib roast and such. That's fair, ain't it?"

"Sacred name!" screamed the *señor*. "A bull fight, she no go that way! Theese ees too much!"

"What kind of racket you trying to start, McKay?" demanded young Mr. Curley. "We agreed to come in here with old Pep to put on a little act because you promised that Greek sponge-skipper would smuggle us down to the coast and get the bull aboard his schooner to Havana.

"You said Captain Andy wanted twenty bucks and you'd raise it with your Spanish fiesta. Look at this horrible dump—one store and a string of shanties along a ditch and the end of the dirt road. Pepino's not used to such sordid surroundings. But we agreed to let old Pep perform like he did with the carnival. The *señor* had a horse trained to go in the ring; and him and old Pep they charged and danced about and butted a little maybe, and Lupe swinging his sword in some fancy passes. And that is strictly all, McKay. No barbecue!"

"Oh, sure, I knowed that. But we ain't got any horses here and the only mule there ever was on Jigger Key passed out in the last hurricane. So I went over and bargained with them cowpokes, Othie Trego an' Misfit Mullally, to git some kind of critter. Their rodeo is closed an' there's no more glammer gals to scare with their fake bronco-bustin', so they said they'd gimme their trick ridin' steer fer the fiesta."

"Who's goin' to ride that animal?" said Blink sharply.

"Why, me. I ain't no fancy pants nor red blankets but I figger on what I seen in movies to git some action. In fact, I know dang well how a bull fight goes. A feller they call the matador, he comes chargin' in and jabs the bull in the neck with a pickador—"

"No—no!" shouted Señor Lupe. "Not so! It cannot be!"

"Aw, nuts," said Mr. Curley. "Mase, you got it all mixed. The matador is the bird who does the kill after the picadors do their stuff. But nobody gets hurt in our show."

"WELL, I figger folks'll wanta see a little blood. You know some o' the kids back in these jungles never laid eyes on a cow in all their born days except on a canned milk label. I helped tow an ol' sea cow that got stranded, in past Sable once, and tried to collect ten cents a head for lookin' at it.

"The durn thing soured on me so that one whiff at half a mile was plenty, and they got that for nothin'.

"Well, mebbe I did talk this bull fight up a trifle strong. But them fellers want to see battle, an' not jest a waltz between a rodeo ridin' steer and a carnival bull like yore Pep. These cowboys'll be here

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by noon bringin' their animal down from Kissimmee in a scow with Ol'-man Cap Johnson guidin' 'em in. And I hope that critter can fight some anyhow, if the bull won't.

"Othie Trego said he ain't no bull but it wasn't his fault. He aimed to be a bull, but somebody done him wrong when he was jest a baby. Othie said he was gentle as a lam' an' anybody could ride him. So about this battle I ain't any sword so I'm goin' to get me a gig-spear. I figger if I harpoon yore bull a coupla times he'll wake up an' show some int'rest."

"*Madre de dios,*" moaned Señor Lupe. "A feesh-hook for my Pepino! A mule! And you want he be a barbecue! No—not ever!"

Young Mr. Curley calmed him down. "Aw, never mind. Ol' Pep won't get jabbed. He just puts on a show. Paws the ground and rolls his eyes and bellows, and when he butts he makes it easy. He takes his cues from the *señor* just like a trained seal. Won't hurt anybody."

"Well," said Mase dubiously, "I hope they like it. I'd hate to disappoint 'em. Some o' them bootleggin' boys from Fiddler Creek'll be here an' they don' stand fer fakes. And them cowpokes look kinda mean to me."

"For the love of Hooley," said Blink. "Don't start trouble. We got enough now dodging the sheriff."

"Sure we don't want trouble. I'm a peaceful party myself. An' *I* don't want to see Sheriff Bill Hodge. Him an' me has mixed before. If he came in here tryin' to attach yore bull he'd take me out on account of stagin' a bull fight. I know that cuss—eager to git me mixed up in stuff.

"But I sure am disappointed. I thought I was goin' to have a battle an' here you say, no blood, no rough stuff; jest two primmer donny critters actin' like a lotta dumb movie actors. I'm skairt some o' these boys I got two bits out of fer the show will start to climb me if them animals don't fight. So if there's any fight in 'em I aim to bring it out."

"No—no—" pleaded Señor Lupe.

"Say," said Blink suddenly, "I know them rodeo cowpokes. I tried to get a job press-agenting their show once. They put me out. A couple of tough guys, Mase. Don't cross them up."

"Great grief an' destruction! Who'm I gonna please anyhow? I take a chance to get hooked in the pants or tromped jest to raise a little dough fer you guys and you're scared your bull'll git a black eye."

"How much money you raise?" said Promoter Curley anxiously. "And how much do Trego and Mullally get of the gate?"

"They ain't no gate. I promised the Greek skipper, Andy, twenty bucks, and guaranteed Othie Trego ten bucks and the gas to tow his outfit in from up Tamiami Trail. All I took in yit is a measly nine dollars and fifty cents. So you see, I gits desperate yestiddy and went to boostin' that barbecue idea—the animal that gits licked gits et."

"Old Pep's so tough you'd break a jaw jest on his gravy," said Blink. "*Señor,* don't get excited. This feller Mase, his old man warns me, is always sounding off big. He'll want to steal the show for himself and ol' Pep won't have to sweat a hair."

"Yeah?" asked Mase. "My ol' man say that? It'll cost him dough." He started for the store. The strategy was to get a fist in the cash first.

THE one road out from Jigger Town was a grass-hummocky trail along an ancient canal, and during rainy seasons completely impossible. And from Jigger westward there was nothing but the scummy canal petering out in the 'Glades that stretched to the Ten Thousand Isles bordering the Mexican Gulf.

There were ways through but no stranger could find them. The two Kissimmee boys from the West Coast cowlands had a guide that Mase had recommended; but here it was nearly noon and they hadn't showed up.

About sixty men and boys had come in to the Key and idled about the McKay store and the row of cabins on the canal;

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and some of them were grumbling about what Mase had told them.

Especially eats; they had gone to look at the bull and to figure whether or not Mase had been just plain lying.

This Cuban bull, Pepino, was sure nothing a man would want to bite into offhand. Pep wasn't so big but he was black and stubby with a thick wrinkled neck and rolling red eyes. His horns had been cut and capped with gleaming brass knobs, and his hoofs polished and tail-combed.

Old-man Cap'n Johnson said it all when he swore that anybody who pried a sandwich off that critter sure had a job.

They had heard about this rodeo ridin' steer which Mase had bargained for, but far as Jigger Key folks knew Mase McKay had never ridden anything except an ancient jallopy and a trapping johnboat. Then how about a bull ring? Suppose one of these critters took a notion to charge the audience. What about that, hey?

"Ain't got a bull ring, so we don't need a bull ring," said Mase. "This yere battle's comin' off in the sand flat east o' the store. You got a good growth o' palmettoes on three sides to jump into if you have to; and the other side's the drain ditch.

"The only thing is, I want every guy that comes out to see this battle to have two-bits in his jeans. I got to pay off before the show starts—at least that's what the rodeo boys think, and Señor Lupe also."

"Ah, so," panted Señor Lupe. "The money, she is important."

"You're talking," added young Curley. "In fact it's essential. If we don't sneak Pep westward tonight on Andy's scow the sheriff will find us sure. And we dug up our last dollar to get here. *Señor*, this McKay bunch have got us. I didn't know all the details that Mase had in mind but here we are. We got to go through with this now. It won't be anything but a big joke."

"Yeah?" said Mase. "How you know? You guys wait an' see. It all depends what kind o' fightin' animal them rodeo boys bring over. Once I harpoon this bull he'll discover grief and woe ahead o' him."

"No—no," repeated Señor Lupe agitatedly. "I forbid."

"Let 'em go, *señor,*" said Blink. "If I had a buck, I'd bet that Pep butts McKay and his riding steer clear off the lot. When you pay off, Mase?"

Mase was counting some bills and silver; then he looked down the road to the McKay store. The hell of it was that his old man knew from experience just how Mase would try to finance this fiesta and had hidden the cashbox in a good safe spot back in the tin-roofed warehouse. Mase told himself gloomily that he should have known enough to get his fist in that box first.

"Well, about this yere financin' end," he began, and then let out a whoop and started for the store. The gang around the porch had yelled and streamed about the little warehouse to the canal.

"Come on," Mase yelled. "Them Kissimmee boys has got here."

HE ARRIVED well ahead of Curley and Señor Lupe. Two grim-faced gents with battered white hats were on the wharf.

The swamp guide who had brought them through was mooring his little open launch, and alongside was a narrow scow with a fence about the gunwales. A flap-eared critter gazed placidly out upon the crowd; and upon Mase McKay's second look he yelled indignantly at the two cowboys.

"Hey, what's this! That ain't the animal you showed me last Wednesday. It's a dam' ol' cow, that's what!"

"Yeah," said Othie Trego languidly, "me an' Misfit kinda figgered, when we thought it over, that maybe a ridin' steer would be too rough fer you to handle, you bein' not experienced down here. So we bought a cow—Samp Curtis' old cow. She rides easy as butter."

"Yeah," said Misfit Mullally, "gentle as a hen, that cow is. We figgered a swamper down in these parts oughta have

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a gentled animal fer this show. Hey, Bessie, ain't you been brung up gentle?"

"Look yere," said Mase. "Didn't I tell you this was to be a bull fight? And us folks don't have no horses ner mules, nothin' like that in fifteen miles o' Jigger Key, and we don't drink milk an' don't want nothin' to do with ary milk cow. You fellers done wrong."

"Listen, pilgrim," said Trego and he eyed the crowd to see if it was hostile to two strangers in the land. "We was lookin' out fer your own good, and hopin' the best fer you."

Folks began to snicker, and then Blink Curley and Señor Lupe arrived. The two Kissimmee boys had gone to shoving a chute out from the scow; and when it was on the bank up walked the yellow cow, switching her tail amiably as if she felt right at home.

Mase pulled Blink and the *señor* to the corner of the store and whispered, "I never did have no faith in cowboys. These guys are jest a coupla bums."

"Don't be so sure," said Mr. Curley. "Those are Florida cowboys and they use gads instead of ropes to handle their stock in the big grass; but they run a pretty good rodeo during the tourist season upstate. Sure they aren't dressed the part like you Jigger Key folks expected but don't start razzin' 'em. They can be tough. Plenty."

Señor Lupe had gone to look at the cow and came back beaming. "Hah! *That* is no danger for Pepino! She has the good heart. She is *sympatico,* theese cow."

"Yeah, I reckon," sighed Mase. "Them two critters are liable to kiss and elope fer the deep swamp and the fiesta is blowed up. Who's goin' to pay money fer *this* kind o' show? I'm gonna git stuck fer the guarantees outo my own pocket, that's what. It all goes to show I'm too trustin'—always gittin' in dutch tryin' to help some guy."

Othie Trego came along and his blue eyes glittered in a sun-burned face. Misfit ambled along behind him with a chew of tobacco.

"What's this we hear," said Othie, "about you advertisin' that you're goin' to have a barbecue, and the animal that gets licked is goin' to be et?"

"Not Samp Curtis' cow, not by a damn sight," added Misfit, crisply.

"Oh, well," Mase grunted. "Keep yore shirts on. Ain't you ever heard of a promoter fer a show tryin' to git public attention? You guys are sure hard to please. I'm a peaceful party myself, an' lookit, jest to save this show an' raise a little money fer you I gotta straddle a damn cow and try to harpoon the *señor's* bull 'til he shows some int'rest; an' the *señor* says, 'No. Don't jab Pepino.' Well, long as I promised the crowd a free feed I gotta talk the old man into lettin' me have a case o' sardines an' enough crackers to go around."

Old Man McKay heard that from the store window: "I knew it was comin'," he said. "You make promises like a damn politician and I have to foot the bill. I hope this Cuban's bull runs you up a tree an' then hooks it down."

"That's a fine way to talk to yore own flesh and blood—an' me tryin' to put Jigger Key on the map so tourists hear about it.

"Even the sheriff never heard of it till you growed up an' started to see how much devilment you could git into," said his old man. "Well, go ahead, knock off a case o' sardines fer the sake o' peace."

MASE went out for another look at that cow from Kissimmee. Just a bony old moo cow with a kind eye and burrs in her tail. The swamp citizens were wolfing the grub that Mr. McKay had passed out, but they grumbled and muttered.

Sardines was no cow-meat feed; and the bootleggin' boys from the deep 'Glades began to pass along pints and figure that maybe a little trouble wouldn't do no harm.

Mase went on down to the bull pen after a final word with the cow. "Now, look yere, Bessie, we got to show some-

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thin'. I ain't blamin' nobody but them dam' cowboys for leadin' you into this. The spectators want a little blood, jest to show it's a battle. Jest gimme one chance to jab that duded-up bull in the ear —hear me, Bessie? I'm yore friend."

Othie Trego and Misfit Mullally came along to size up the enemy. Señor Lupe had his arm around Pep's sleek neck and he was protesting and explaining to the Kissimmee boys. "No bloodshed, eh?"

"Oh, sure not. Our animal is gentle as a lamb," said Othie.

"She's been gentled to ride kids around in our rodeo parade." Explained Misfit, "Señor, we both been done wrong by this McKay. He's got us into the worst sore-back village I ever see. No beer, no girls, no arena to exhibit in. We ought to take our cow and go home."

"Ah, but the money we must have? Yes?" said Señor Lupe.

Mase came along and Misfit grunted menacingly. "Hey, you! Mr. Lupe here and us agreed neither of our animals gits scratched up. You better see to it. Now I understand these critters will charge and butt head on till one gits pushed off the lot. Round one. Then McKay— Oh, well, neve' mind. He can take keer of himself."

"Meanin' jest what?" said Mase. "Sure I can."

"Well, you're a long-legged party and Bessie ain't so tall. The lot is got cactus a-plenty, and you ought to wear somethin' except overalls. I'm a good-hearted guy myself, just offering advice." And again Misfit gazed at his partner long and mysteriously.

"Don't listen to Misfit," said Othie. "He always looks on the dark side o' things. I have a terrible time keepin' him cheered up."

"Well, people are coming out from the store," said Mr. Curley. "Let's all go through the crowd and collect a little more money. The *señor* and I'll need it before we ever see Havana again."

The spectators were ambling out to the sand patch in the palmettoes. Some of the boys from the fish camps around the Cape Sable country had come up; and a party of Greek spongers from the West Coast fleet; and most of the natives who had nothing to do in the off trapping and hunting season; a bunch of moonshine bootleggers from the hidden hammocks north in the grass; and some small truck-growers from the Jigger Key road back to the East highway.

All in all, with a few jugs of swamp corn peddled around, public interest was rising and Othie Trego and Misfit heard a good many jeering remarks when they went to get their riding cow.

This was just some kind of racket which Mase McKay and the Kissimmee boys were putting over to gyp people out of a few dollars; and maybe these strangers should be run out of the village. Civic pride was nursing a baby grudge that threatened to grow to giant manhood.

"Yeah?" said Misfit. "Wanta make a little bet, you guys?"

"Hey," muttered Othie, "cut that out. Don't mess with these swamp boys. We're just two pilgrims in a strange land, Misfit."

Misfit was the only man in sight who wore a gun and he hitched his belt higher and took a chew while Othie saddled the rodeo cow. The cow came along amiably, with not a care in the world except ticks; and the two led her out in the sandy clearing.

Señor Lupe's bull was on the opposite side and the *señor* seemed to be whispering in his ear.

THAT animal had seemed contented enough, sleepy and full of good chicken feed from the McKay store. Señor Lupe continued his instructions with now and then a jab in Pep's ribs, and presently the bull began to lower his head and paw the sand and roll his eyes. Mase McKay looked across the lot at him.

"What kind o' war talk is that?" said Mase to Blink Curley. "Suppose he takes a notion to chase everybody outa here?"

"No, he won't. He's been trained since he was a calf for doin' acts in carnivals. He wouldn't even heave a roar unless

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Lupe gives him the sign. Just like a trained seal or circus lion."

"Well, don't tell them bootleggers from Shark River that. They paid their money to see battle. It ain't goin' to be so nice if they ain't satisfied."

"It's up to you," said Blink; and then Misfit strolled over.

"Yeah, it sure's up to you, McKay," said he. "You run that bull off the lot or else—"

"Else what? Dam' if everybody don't pick on me an' I'm tryin' to put on a show fer 'em. You tell me yore cow is trained to steer around by kickin' her ribs and pullin' on the halter, and I got to keep her outa harm's way when the *señor's* animal charges us. Well, I hope she don't have a mental attack or nothin'. That bull is beginnin' to act up excited."

"Well, you brung it on yourself," said Misfit. "You got to harpoon him off before he hurts Bessie. Get me?" And he put his hand on his gun and leveled hard eyes at the Jigger Key crowd.

"That harpoonin' act isn't so hot with us," added Promoter Curley.

"That's right," said Mase. "Try to make me feel bad, all of you." He felt of his weapon, a five-foot three-tined gig-spear.

"Be careful o' Bessie's ears with that thing," said Othie.

"This thing ain't so hot to tickle a bull with. An' this cow you fellers rung in on me ain't no horns at all. Mr. Curley, I hope the *señor* knows what he's sayin' when he tells his bull won't be rough."

"He won't be bad unless he gets too annoyed," said Blink Curley.

"Yeh, but how do I know what he considers too much? Looks like he's startin' off with a dirty look at me right now."

"That's his act," said Curley, "the *señor's* working him up to do his murder stuff, but it don't mean a thing."

"Throw a leg over that saddle," said Misfit. "Our ridin' cow is that way too. Don't mean a thing—just put on a show like she was in a rodeo instead of performin' before a lot o' conk puddle-jumpers."

Othie held the cow's halter, and Misfit the thin soft saddle. He drew a cinch tighter and sighed and so did the cow, kind of bellying herself out and then collapsing amidships. Misfit tightened her again.

"Git on, McKay. We don't have to coach our animal like the Cuban guy does his. She knows her act like she was brought up to it."

They held to this Bessie cow while Mase McKay slid carefully over her spine. She kind of wilted down and then blew herself up carefully and looked around at Mase's left leg. He had to buckle both legs up along her ribs, being tall to ride a cow; and then he balanced his harpoon across her shoulders.

The spectators among the breast-high palmettoes around the edges of the sandy lot looked back for safe exits, and then resumed their jeering. They had a lot to say about that barbecue, and who was going to be et. The Kissimmee boys didn't like the crowd, and Othie handed out some dirty looks.

The cow took a step forward and then Misfit whispered to his partner.

"Wait. You see what I see?"

"What you mean? This mob startin' on us?"

"Hang to that halter a minute," whispered Misfit. "I just want to know somethin'! Some new parties has just drove in."

HE TURNED back to the crowd and Mase couldn't see him. Mase was clamping his legs close to the cow's ribs and eyeing that black bull with his brassy little horns. He hoped the critter was all that his owner claimed to be—a trained carnival fighter, full of noise and action and nothing else.

Somewhere in the distance he heard his old man arguing hotly, but then his old man was always croaking disaster.

Othie pulled on the halter and the cow came along gentle as could be. Señor Lupe leaned on his bull's shoulder and gave final instructions. Pepino lowered his head and rolled his eyes and wrinkled his neck.

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Then he pawed the sand and bellowed, and the spectators on that side began to back away looking for handy trees.

"Now, see here, cow," Mase muttered, "until we git the hang o' this mebbe we better spar around some. You an' me wasn't never brung up fer this business. Yo're a peaceful party by the look o' yore eye; but I sincerely trust yore legs is good. Jest keep outa his way till we size him up."

"All ready?" grunted Othie. "Say the word an' I turn you loose."

"Leggo. Sooner this is over the better I'll feel. Go ahead—"

Othie was looking past him over the crowd and muttering to himself. "Well, I wonder? Kin it be? If so—"

He saw Misfit's hat over the palmettoes in the rear of the crowd toward the Jigger Key road. He saw old man McKay's bald head and Cap Johnson's white whiskers and one or two other prominent citizens of Jiggertown, and they were all about a small canvas-topped car which apparently had just jolted in.

The two occupants straightened up and gazed over the heads of the welcoming committee. Mase saw none of this because he was grimly watching the other way at old Pep.

"Go git him, Bessie," whispered Mase, "bring his tail home fer a trophy. Butt his slats in an' I'll gig his eyes shut. They won't know him when he gits back to Havana. We'll make cat meat outa him."

"Wait," said Othie hoarsely. "Somethin' tells me I'd just as soon be somewhere else than bullfightin'."

"Leggo," said Mase, "give us the gas while we feel like goin'."

"Uh-huh," whispered Othie. "Well, smart swamper, you asked for it. Go get him, Bessie!"

And he kicked his cow in the rump and turned on his heel back to the sidelines. And Mr. Trego watched that crowd about the car behind the palmettoes. If those guys weren't deputy sheriffs, then he'd never seen any. He caught a badge flashing on one man's shirt as the two stood up to watch this bull fight. He even heard Misfit Mullally explain that this wasn't any illegal bullfight, but just a little innocent fun.

Then Mr. Mullally and the rest turned their attention to the bullring, for the spectators had raised a general roar. A growing howl of approval which became universal joy as they watched.

Señor Lupe's bull still stood at the side but he was ceasing to shake his neck and bellow. Doubt and distrust grew in Pep's eyes. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before.

Mase McKay's cow was enveloped in a cloud of sand as she whirled and whirled. She rose up forward and came down aft. Then she went into reverse, up with her hind quarters and down stiff-legged forward. She blatted menace.

Sometimes it was hard to see young McKay, for he was down on her shoulders, with his long arms around her neck. At her next buck daylight gleamed between Mase's pants and the saddle.

"Sure," grunted Misfit, "I give that smartie just sixty seconds aboard that cow. Sure—there he goes—"

"No, not yet," said Othie. "Say about the law now, we better explain—"

"I bet one buck," resumed Misfit. "There he goes."

"No, not yet. He's got a neck hold on her—and it ain't fair ridin'. Say, now, we better explain to that sheriff that we ain't aidin' and abettin' cruelty to animals. He come to stop this bull fight. We didn't do it."

"Hell, no! the bull don't either. He just looks plumb surprised."

THERE were more yells from the ringside. Everybody except Sheriff Bill Hodge and Deputy Clemmer left the car and streamed back to the palmetto ridge.

"That black animal on this side," said the sheriff, "that's the one our papers call for. What's young McKay tryin' to choke that cow for?"

"His old man says this is a Spanish fiesta. Let 'em alone. Maybe he'll break a leg. Don't serve papers till we see it."

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The bull fight was getting hotter and hotter but the bull was taking no part in it. He sidled back a step, hoping to be declared neutral, and looked about for his protector, Señor Lupe. But like Promoter Blink Curley and the rest, the *señor* had retired to the palmetto barrier.

That cow and Mase McKay were taking up a lot of room.

She bucked and she r'ared; and then she quit for breath and glared. Mase had harpooned her once in the ear but it was an accident. He tried to straighten up and slide back in the saddle and soothe her.

"Listen, baby, settle down an' charge 'im. Shake a tail and bore into him while he's lookin' the other way. He's scared already just to look at us; he's nervous. Cow, you got the sign on him, so go!"

She went, but she went straight up. Mase heaved over her shoulders and locked to her neck. A short guy wouldn't have had a chance. Man, this round was bad. She jumped and came down stiff-legged until her joints cracked and Mase McKay's did too. She sat down and then leaped. In the air she whirled and hooked. These gyrations took them across the lot ten yards from the bull and the *señor* yelled.

"Pepino! Come away. It ees no place to be!"

Mr. Curley pulled the *señor* back. "Keep out of there. Somebody's liable to get hurt. Mase and that cow have gone nuts. Oh, m' gosh, there's the sheriff back of Pep—Old Hodge watching from his car. Oh, m' gosh!"

Señor Lupe dodged below the palmettoes and moaned. Mr. Curley pulled him lower and tried to remember anything he knew about law. Maybe, if a guy kept out of sight, they couldn't serve papers on him legal. But there was old Pep out there swaying uncertainly, his stubby horns shining, and now and then snorting feebly. He had lost his prompter, and he didn't know what he was supposed to do next.

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That cow was sidling toward him crab-fashion. Her eyes bulged and she swelled her ribs again. Misfit Mullally on the far side of the lot mused to his pal. "About two minutes and he ain't gone yet."

"I'd oughta took your bet," said Othie. "That farmer dassen't let go her neck and he knows it. The way he lays out if you could just fan his pants with a slug maybe it would break up his hold."

"Yeah, an' the sheriff right across there. Nope, if that cow can't get him, I'm ashamed of her. I come down here to see Bessie wipe him through them cactus and cure him of braggin' and blowin' so much and' he's stuck almost three minutes. You wait, she'll get him flat."

"There she goes agin! There he goes!"

"No they side-passed into the bull. They slapped him and he don't like it. Where's that harpoon act this guy was goin' to show off?"

But Mase had lost his gig-spear. This was the first time he had been in range of fighting the bull and he was too busy to attend to it.

The bull fight had been solo up to this point, but now old Pep was pushed into it, and he sure didn't like it. He bellowed once and looked about for the *señor* and then turned. Tail up, he started for the Jigger Key road; and the Kissimmee cow, tail up, started after him.

Mase was aboard when she hit the road, and there ahead was the little open car of Sheriff Bill Hodge.

The sheriff yelled warningly and then jumped back. He had to.

OLD PEP was sure in a fuddle. He wasn't accustomed to do battle unless Señor Lupe was at hand to supervise. But the *señor* had fled. Pep saw the open road and took it just as the cow bumped him from behind. Old Pep bawled for help and swerved—which was nice for Sheriff Hodge and the deputy as they had space for just about two more jumps in the narrow space between the road and the drain canal.

The combat plunged into the little roadster, and it crashed off the dirt bank into the ditch. Pep lunged past the sinking top, up the other bank and vanished into the jungle.

Mase and his cow didn't appear to notice. Bessie went on down the grass road bucking and sidewinding, and the spectators lost sight of them. Mase was on top until Bessie reached the first moss-hung little oak on the hammock and then she scraped him off saddle and departed westward past the McKay store.

The spectators had cut across through the palmettoes hoping to see the finish, and some of the swamp boys were still yelling and cutting loose a few shots into the air.

Señor Lupe and Mr. Curley arrived in the rear and found Mase McKay sitting up dizzily under the oak. The bullfighter was something of a mess; his shirt was gone; he sported two black eyes, four loose teeth and an ear full of blood.

"What kind o' fight was that?" he managed to blurt out. "That cow was after me, not the bull. And she wouldn't a' got rid o' me yit if she hadn't rubbed me into this tree. It ain't right."

"The sheriff—" whispered Señor Lupe hoarsely.

"Yes," panted Mr. Curley. "Mase, he come for Pepino, and you know what I think? Those two guys from Kissimmee they framed you, Mase. They fetched down a rodeo cow that's trained to buck and put on a show. Othie and Misfit Mullally didn't expect you to stick for two jumps. Say, we better get out of here. Pep wrecked the sheriff's car—him and you and the cow. Boy, he's sore. He'll take us out."

"If he ain't got a car he can't take nobody out. But I dunno as I want to see him. Him an' my old man can argy like they did the last time Hodge was huntin' me. But where's them two cowboys? Figgered to put something over on me, did they? Gimme an animal that nobody can ride? Thought I was a smartie to make a fool of? All right, let 'em find their dang cow *now*, out in that west jungle."

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"I implore," said *Señor* Luge. "We must depart! Where is Pepino?"

Mase got up groggily. "Let him alone. He cut into that swamp so deep the law ain't got gum boots long enough to find him in a week. Andy and me'll round him up for you tonight or whenever Bill Hodge goes out. Andy'll load him and tow out west'ard and get his twenty like I promised. What've folks hollerin' about? I give 'em a show didn't I?"

"Boy," said Mr. Curley, "you did. Here comes Othie Trego and Misfit. I'm not going to mix with *those* two cowboys now."

Mase McKay limped down toward the store. He could hear loud voices behind the jungle that bordered the road.

The sheriff was cussing all Jigger Key men because they stood around and yelled derision instead of finding some way of getting his car out of the mud.

Mase met Othie and Misfit whispering by the McKay warehouse. Othie turned to meet him. "Look here, rube, what you done with our cow?"

Mase shrugged.

"Dam' if I know. Lookit what she done with me. But I ain't got nothin' agin' her. She done noble, chasin' the *señor's* bull into that car. She saved ol' Pop from the law, I bet. Boys, I admire that cow."

"Listen," said Othie. "We're just two lone guys down here or we'd hang your hide on the fence. Bull fighter—hey? Big bull fighter!"

"Yeh," said Mase. "You seen me, didn't you? Go tell yore grief to the sheriff. I'm layin' out in the bresh till he goes back to town."

LOOKING AHEAD!

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DALE CLARK

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JANUARY 4th

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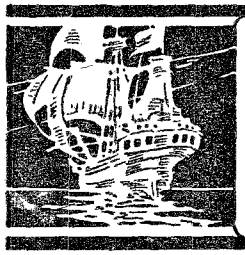

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THE task of sending out Christmas greetings is particularly difficult for us. Our messages must reach the most obscure corners of the earth; they must travel backward and forward in time. No mailman is able to serve us, and so we can only set down our greetings here, hoping that by some Christmas magic they will reach our friends.

Here are a few of the addresses. To the Legionnaire soon to die at his desert post, still fighting though his battle is lost and his Legion finished. To Sheriff Henry Harrison Conroy of Wild Horse Valley, who drinks the season's toast in prune whisky. To Captain Horatio Hornblower, now pacing the bridge of H.M.S. *Sutherland,* sharply on the lookout for a French man-o'-war. To a gallant and cunning Hindu whose personal code is nobler and more rigorous than the code of his caste.

To Mark and Nona, cheerfully making over the future while Omega smiles. To a gentleman of Chinatown, who shuffles out quietly to administer justice where the White Devil police have failed. To that dark and Godly prizefighter, Refugee Smith, while he hymns his way to victory. To Mase McKay in the Glades; No-Shirt McGee in Alaska; Robin the Bombardier in France; Dave McNally somewhere in trouble—to these friends of ours and countless others of their splendid kind, we send the season's greetings. To them, and to you the readers, Merry Christmas.

Now we must get down to the week's business. A fervent admirer of Wayne McCloud fears that we have dropped that canny Dabbit Runner from our list. But we haven't; we're simply waiting for Mr. Kjelgaard to deliver.

ALBERT OLSON

I'd like to know what ever happened to Jim Kjelgaard and his character, Wayne McCloud. I just get nicely started reading that series in ARGOSY when *bang* they stop. After that I started prowling through the back-issue stories. I guess I've gobbled up all of Kjelgaard's they had and now I find his stories in other magazines but not in ARGOSY.

I don't say there is nothing good left in ARGOSY without those Dabbit Run stories, but I like Kjelgaard's yarns best of any you print. ELMIRA, N. J.

Our next correspondent seeks information from Walt Coburn, and we have already forwarded the letter. Perhaps some of you may be able to help.

A. S. HAFF

I have been reading ARGOSY for so long I've forgotten when I began. And will continue as long as I have 10¢ to pay for a copy. Now I am asking for information. In your October 19 issue you have a story called "Black Fire" by Walt Coburn. In that story he writes of Kosterlisky's Rurales.

Here is what I would like Mr. Coburn to tell me. What he knows about Kosterlisky. If he is alive still and where Mr. Coburn met him, if he did. In fact anything he can tell me about the Count will be appreciated.

In 1898 and 1899 I was stationed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. And one day while on business in Nogales, Arizona and Mexico, I chanced to meet a tall fierce mustached Mexican officer. He was introduced to me as Count Kosterlisky, a Russian in employ of Mexico.

At this time he was in Nogales training poor Mexican "Rows" to make soldiers of them, to fight the Yaqui Indians.

Kosterlisky was known then and there as a Russian count. And he surely looked the part. I can see him now with his fierce, pointed mustache at least six inches long and his close-cropped beard. He looked every inch a soldier. It did me good to see his name in ARGOSY. BABYLON, L. I.

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